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Nevada's fiber optic network may get another tool for expansion.

Lawmakers are considering Senate Bill 53, which would authorize the Nevada Department of Transportation and telecommunications companies to work together to grow the state's fiber optic network in a way that benefits both the public and private sectors. The bill, sponsored by Gov. Brian Sandoval's Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, was heard Tuesday in the Senate Transportation Committee. No immediate action was taken.

Specifically, the legislation would allow NDOT and telecommunications companies to conduct "fiber trading" to help grow the state's infrastructure. For example, a company allowed access to the state's right-of-way along a highway for fiber optic cable could give the state access to part of its fiber optic system, such as a tower or miles of fiber elsewhere. "The need and appetite for broadband in Nevada is great," Brian Mitchell, director of the Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, told the committee. Mitchell said such deals can help overcome the high costs of growing broadband capacity and help the state grow more quickly.

The bill is modeled after a practice in Utah, which traded for 812 miles of fiber optic network between 2011 and 2015. Reid Kaiser, assistant director of operations for NDOT, said the legislation could allow the agency to broaden the use of technology such as cameras showing roadway conditions online. State Sen. Mark Manendo, who chairs the committee, said the practice is a good way to avoid repeated excavations along the same roadways. "I never understood why everybody's not on the same page and working together," the Las Vegas Democrat said. "'Dig once' should be stamped on everybody's forehead."

Testimony from the telecommunications industry was mixed. Randy Robison, a lobbyist for CenturyLink, said the company has participated in the Utah program and had a favorable experience there. John Lopez, a lobbyist with Cox Communications, said his company would like to see changes to the bill, citing concerns about the "broad authority" given to NDOT to set compensation rates for the use of right-of-way space.

The legislation also expands the duties of the Office of Science, Innovation and Technology, and requires the office to develop a strategic plan for broadband service in Nevada; apply for state and federal grants to expand broadband services; and expanding fiber infrastructure for public safety. The

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Allentown Morning Call
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bill would require the office to administer the fiber trade policy for fiber optic infrastructure. – ***Las Vegas Review-Journal***

President Trump's new Federal Communications Commission chairman is adamant on jettisoning Obama administration net neutrality regulations, especially as the industry moves toward next generation 5G networks. "The torch of the FCC has been passed to a new generation," Ajit Pai declared in remarks he made during the Mobile World Congress trade show in Barcelona.

Calling for a "light-touch approach to regulation," Pai pledged to pursue a broadband policy that is "practical, not ideological," adding that the government will "embrace what works" and "dispense with what doesn't." What he clearly thinks doesn't work are the **net neutrality regulations** that aim to level the playing field for Internet traffic. Under the regulations, for example, Internet content providers cannot pay the companies that supply broadband so that their content gets preferential treatment through higher speed Internet lanes.

Content companies such as Netflix and Google were in favor of the FCC using its power to protect an open Internet. Companies such as AT&T and Comcast that offered the bandwidth balked at the regulation. Last month, Democratic Sen. Al Franken of Minnesota, also **pressed Pai to protect net neutrality**, passed in 2015 by the FCC, then chaired by Tom Wheeler, a Democrat.

That appears unlikely, based on the comments made at MWC by Pai, named FCC chairman last month by President Trump. He likened the Obama policies to regulations crafted for a 1930s telecom monopoly, while praising what he says was a moderate bipartisan approach pursued by the Clinton Administration, notably that the Internet should be free from heavy-handed regulation.

"The policies of the Clinton administration, Bush administration and the first term of the Obama administration have produced a free and open Internet and strong incentives for private investment and broadband infrastructure," Pai said. "Two years later it is evident that the FCC made a mistake (which) injected tremendous uncertainty into the broadband market, and uncertainty is the enemy of growth." Pai says that "after the FCC embraced utility-style regulation, the United States experienced the first-ever decline in broadband investment outside of a recession." That statement echoes what the carriers have said, though net neutrality proponents have countered it's been overblown.

Broadband providers' capital expenditures declined $1 billion to $76 billion in 2015, according to USTelecom's annual broadband investment research report, released in December 2016. USTelecom is a trade association that counts among its members AT&T and Verizon. In a similar finding, AT&T has decreased its broadband capital expenditures by 18% and 16% in 2015 and 2016 — spending

$17.3 billion and $17.8 billion in those years, respectively — compared to 2014 ($21.2 billion), the last full year without the FCC's net neutrality, or Open Internet rules, according to Hal Singer, an economist and senior fellow at the Progressive Policy Institute. Those figures factor out expenditures for DirecTV and operations in Mexico.

But Internet service providers have constantly used the threat of decreased investment "to undermine the public's clear and overwhelming support for basic net neutrality rules that protect online free speech," said Evan Greer, campaign director for Fight For The Future, a non-profit organization that supports free expression on the Internet. "The reality is that the sky is not falling, and companies shouldn't be able to hold consumers' rights hostage based on their own financial decisions."

To fully realize the potential of 5G, Pai says there must be rules in place that maximize investment, since the 5G rollout will require massive capital expenditures on infrastructure. "Remember networks don't have to be built, risks don't have to be taken, capital doesn't have to be spent in the communications sector. And so the more difficult that government makes it to rebuild a business…the less likely it is that broadband providers, big and small will take the risk (and) invest the billions of dollars that are needed to connect consumers to digital (opportunities)." His goal is to build "smart infrastructure, not dumb pipes."

Pai claims the change in the control of the FCC is already benefiting consumers. For example, earlier this month, the FCC ended its investigation into the free data offerings known as "Zero Rating," saying that such free data plans have proven to be popular among consumers, particularly those with lower incomes. "The truth is that consumers like getting something for free and they want the providers to compete by introducing new data service offerings. Our recent decision simply respected those preferences."

Pai said "the best evidence of the wisdom of our new approach is what happened afterward," when all four major U.S. wireless providers announced new or refreshed unlimited data plans. Not everyone agrees with the chairman, Greer says. Without rules preventing paid prioritization, ISPs can become "gatekeepers who can essentially pick and choose winners and losers. ... Without bright line rules to prevent it, there's nothing to stop companies from stifling competition and driving consumers toward their own products." Pai separately made news Monday, when he told the *Wall Street Journal* that he didn't anticipate the agency to have a role in reviewing the pending AT&T-Time Warner merger. – ***USA Today***

Comcast Corp.'s Universal theme park division bought a remaining 49-percent stake in Universal Studios Japan that it didn't own for $2.3 billion. Comast now owns 100 percent of the business. The deal pushes Comcast's NBCUniversal unit deeper into the theme park business that has boomed under the Philadelphia company's ownership since 2011. The purchase price, with debt, values Universal Studios Japan at $7.4 billion. NBCUniversal has said it will expand in Asia with plans for a theme park in Beijing. It also licenses a park in Singapore.

Tom Williams, chairman and CEO for Universal Parks & Resorts, said the Japan park was "amazing and incredibly successful." Comcast bought the stake from Goldman Sachs, former Universal Studios Japan CEO Glenn Gumpel, private-equity firm MBK Partners, and hedge fund Owl Creek Asset Management. The deal is expected to close before the end of April. – ***philly.com***

Turns out, Comcast Xfinity customers won't miss out on any of the Yankees' regular season this year after all. After subscribers were forced to live without Yankees baseball for all of the 2016 season, the YES Network and Comcast announced Tuesday the return of YES to Xfinity as of March 31. YES will be relaunched in the areas in which it was previously carried, and Xfinity customers will be able to watch the March 31 Yankees-Braves preseason game on YES at 7:30 p.m. The Yankees open their regular season the following afternoon against the Rays. The sides had reached an agreement early last month, but did not reveal when the YES Network would reappear on the cable system until Monday.

Xfinity customers who previously received YES and did not change their level of service will automatically see YES on their lineup, in most cases in its previous channel location. A complete listing of YES' channel locations on the Xfinity programming lineup will be available on YESNetwork.com prior to the relaunch. Comcast had stopped carrying the YES Network, which is also home to the Nets, in November 2015. – ***New York Post***

Gov. Tom Wolf late Tuesday night responded to President Donald Trump's first address to Congress.

"The president's address confirmed his plan to repeal the Affordable Care Act and put in place a replacement plan that will hurt millions of Pennsylvania seniors, families and local economies. Repealing the ACA and cutting Medicaid would leave millions of Pennsylvanians without health care, cause seniors to lose home and nursing care, and force small and rural hospitals in Pennsylvania to lay doctors and nurses off and close their doors.

While I appreciate the president's mention of the opioid epidemic, we need specifics on what the president and Congress plan to do about the 125,000 Pennsylvanians whose treatment coverage they want to end. These consequences are only made worse by the plan to further cut Medicaid coverage for kids, seniors and the disabled.

Furthermore, while I am encouraged by the president's plans to invest in infrastructure, we need additional details to make sure any plan creates jobs in Pennsylvania and rebuilds our roads, bridges, public transit and communities. I am ready to work with the President if he wants to help our commonwealth, but when he proposes plans that will harm Pennsylvanians, I will always stand up and put them first." – ***pennlive.com***