To Save Net Neutrality, We Must Build Our Own Internet

We must end our reliance on big telecom monopolies and build decentralized, affordable, locally owned internet infrastructure.

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Image: Lara Heintz/Motherboard

The Federal Communications Commission will announce a full repeal of net neutrality protections Wednesday, according to the *New York Times* and several other media outlets. It is possible

that a committee of telecom industry plutocrats who have from the outset made it their mission to rollback regulations on the industry will bow to public pressure before Wednesday, but let's not count on it.

It is time to take action, and that doesn't mean signing an online petition, upvoting a Reddit post, or calling your member of Congress.

> ***Read More:*** *Sorry, Ajit Pai: Americans Won't Forget Net Neutrality Over Thanksgiving*

Net neutrality as a principle of the federal government will soon be dead, but the protections are wildly popular among the American people and are integral to the internet as we know it. Rather than putting such a core tenet of the internet in the hands of politicians, whose whims and interests change with their donors, net neutrality must be protected by a populist revolution in the ownership of internet infrastructure and networks.

In short, we must end our reliance on big telecom monopolies and build decentralized, affordable, locally owned internet infrastructure. The great news is this is currently possible in most parts of the United States.

There has never been a better time to start your own internet service provider, leverage the publicly available fiber backbone, or build political support for new, local-government owned networks. For the last several months, Motherboard has been chronicling the myriad ways communities passed

over by big telecom have built their own internet networks or have partnered with small ISPs who have committed to protecting net neutrality to bring affordable high speed internet to towns and cities across the country.

A future in which ISPs are owned by local governments, small businesses, nonprofit community groups, and the people they serve are the path forward and the only realistic way of ending big telecom's stranglehold on America.

In Detroit, the Equitable Internet Initiative is building community-owned wireless internet infrastructure in towns that big telecom won't touch. Hundreds of towns have built their own internet service providers. Rural communities are putting wireless internet antennas on top of mountains, grain silos, and tall trees. The fastest internet connections in the United States are provided by local governments, not big telecom. In Southern

California, Tribal Digital Village is using unused television spectrum to deliver internet. All over the country, big telecom is being rejected and subverted, and you do not need to have a pile of money, an army of lawyers, or a degree in network engineering to take action.

Motherboard has and will continue to celebrate and amplify these projects, but that is not enough. Starting immediately, we will:

- Begin researching and publishing technical articles and videos that explain how new wireless networking hardware and software works, how to use it, and how to use currently available, affordable technology to start your own small internet service provider.
- Speak to activists, entrepreneurs, lawyers, technologists, networking engineers, and politicians who have navigated the technical, legal, and political hoops required to start community-owned internet service providers. We will use those

conversations to create clear instructions for how you can empower yourself to do the same.

- Begin creating a comprehensive guide to the various new technologies and methods of creating decentralized internet infrastructure, which will be released next year.

If you want to help or partner with us, please get in touch. We've also created a newsletter to provide specific updates on this project.

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