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Congressional Hearing Notes

A Review of Issues Associated with Protecting and Improving our Nation's Aviation
Satellite-Based Global Positioning System Infrastructure
House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee
Aviation Subcommittee
February 8, 2012

The following recap of this congressional hearing was originally published on SpacePolicyOnline.com on February 8, 2012 under the title "[LightSquared Gets Pounded Again at Another Congressional Hearing.](#)"

Potential interference between LightSquared's satellite-terrestrial mobile broadband system and GPS was the subject of yet another congressional hearing today. Numerous hearings were held last year in a variety of House committees, each warning of calamitous consequences if LightSquared is allowed to implement its system. Today's hearing before the House Transportation and Infrastructure (T&I) committee was no different.

The [hearing](#) comes less than two weeks after the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) issued its [most recent directive](#) about LightSquared. Noting that the FY2012 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations Act (part of the FY2012 Consolidated Appropriations Act) prohibits the FCC from allowing LightSquared to proceed until "concerns of potential widespread harmful interference" are resolved, the FCC declined to grant a request from LightSquared to make a declaratory ruling that GPS devices are not protected against harmful interference as long as LightSquared abides by the FCC's technical parameters.

The company launched a high powered satellite, SkyTerra, in 2010 to use in a mobile broadband system, but requested permission from the FCC to augment the satellite capacity with a network of 40,000 terrestrial cell towers -- an Ancillary Technical Component (ATC) in FCC terminology. In January 2011, the FCC gave LightSquared provisional permission to proceed with the ATC, but the provision was that it had to form a technical committee to perform tests to determine the extent to which interference with GPS would occur. The radio frequency bands assigned to LightSquared are adjacent to some of the GPS bands.

The 2011 FCC decision prompted an [outcry](#) from GPS user communities. Tests conducted by the FCC-required technical committee demonstrated that interference

would indeed be a problem. LightSquared modified its plans and also complained that it has complied with all of the FCC's technical requirements. It asserts that the interference is the fault of GPS receiver manufacturers who did not properly design the receivers.

Another round of tests was ordered last fall, but the results were similar. On January 13, 2012, the government's [National Space-Based PNT \(Positioning, Navigation and Timing\) Advisory Board](#), which is playing a leading role in opposing LightSquared's plans, sent a [letter](#) to the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) stating its "unanimous conclusion ... that both LightSquared's original and modified plans ... would cause harmful interference to many GPS receivers." NTIA, part of the Department of Commerce, oversees government use of radio frequencies, while the FCC governs their use by the private sector.

LightSquared [complained](#) that the tests were "rigged." It called on NTIA and the FCC to conduct another round of tests and for "fair and transparent oversight of the testing process...."

Aviation interests have been particularly vocal in opposing LightSquared because GPS is widely used in the aviation industry. At today's hearing before the aviation subcommittee of the House T&I committee, Deputy Secretary of Transportation John Porcari [said](#) no further testing was warranted at this time. He added that the most recent tests were independently reviewed by Idaho National Lab and MIT Lincoln Lab. Expanding broadband access to more Americans is a major goal of the Obama Administration, he said, but LightSquared is incompatible with "FAA requirements for low-altitude operations" near LightSquared transmitters. Noting that the FAA had already spent over \$2 million in testing and analyzing LightSquared's proposal, he argued that further government investment "cannot be justified at this time."

Other witnesses at the hearing represented the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), a U.N. specialized agency that sets global standards and regulations for aviation safety; the Air Transport Association; the Air Line Pilots Association; the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association; Garmin AT, Inc.; and George Washington University.