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Comcast Corp. Chief Executive Brian Roberts said Tuesday the cable giant is aiming to launch a wireless service by mid-2017, creating a new line of business that could help the company better retain cable customers in a fiercely competitive pay-TV market.

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Speaking at a Goldman Sachs investor conference, Mr. Roberts said the product will take advantage of Comcast's 15 million Wi-Fi hot spots and use airwaves leased from Verizon Communications Inc. Comcast has a deal with Verizon dating back to 2011 that allows the cable company to sell wireless service using the telecom carrier's network at set terms and pricing.

Mr. Roberts said because Comcast is essentially renting Verizon's network, "we won't have to make the kind of investment" needed otherwise, such as cell towers and other infrastructure. "We believe there will be a big payback with reduced churn, more

stickiness and better satisfaction," Mr. Roberts said. Comcast will market the wireless service inside its footprint, to existing and potential Comcast cable customers, as opposed to nationwide. The company is interested in up-selling customers to a bigger bundle of services, Mr. Roberts said. Comcast declined to offer any further details about the service, including pricing and which phones will be supported.

Comcast, like all U.S. cable companies, is increasingly leaning on its broadband business

[legislator who tried to hide her felony conviction should resign before the election](#)

*Philadelphia Daily News*  
[Can Pat Toomey beat a national trend?](#)

as the overall pay-TV business stagnates and consumers cut the cord or trade down to discounted packages. In search of new revenue streams, the cable giant has been seriously weighing its wireless options for at least a year, engaging in discussions with Verizon and testing potential services.

But it will be stepping into a competitive U.S. wireless market, which has four national players who already have more than 100% penetration in the U.S.—meaning there are more active cellphones in use than people in the U.S. As a result, wireless revenue growth is slowing and carriers are locked in a price war over a finite amount of existing subscribers.

Comcast could reduce its infrastructure costs by integrating its Wi-Fi network so that calls and data could be routed through its Wi-Fi hot spots instead of cell towers, whenever possible. New Street Research analyst Jonathan Chaplin said a cable company could “easily steer more than 75% of data traffic to Wi-Fi.” “We believe this will mark a turning point for the U.S. communications landscape,” said Mr. Chaplin, who is bullish on cable’s prospects to steal away some market share from wireless incumbents. He estimated that the wireless business could be worth at least \$6 a share of upside for Comcast’s stock, translating into over \$14 billion of market value.

Comcast’s ability to bundle wireless service with cable TV and home broadband will also give it other advantages not easily matched by wireless carriers. T-Mobile and Sprint Corp. don’t have home broadband or TV offers. Verizon has Fios high-speed internet service, but its footprint is relatively small and the carrier has avoided aggressively bundling Fios with wireless. AT&T Inc. acquired DirecTV last year, [giving it a huge foothold in video](#), but AT&T’s home internet speeds are relatively slow in much of its footprint because of a continued reliance on copper wires.

For Verizon, Comcast’s entry into wireless brings rewards as well as potential risks. If Comcast is able to steal customers from any of its three rivals, then Verizon wins by getting incremental revenue. Even if customers switch from Verizon to Comcast, Verizon is still able to make money off those connections. One risk is that Comcast could get more ambitious, and that the initial offer is just the first step in a bigger plan to compete. Comcast is currently participating in a government auction of wireless airwaves, which could be used to build a network.

Also at the Tuesday conference, Mr. Roberts introduced Comcast’s newly integrated Netflix experience on [its next-generation X1 set-top box and guide](#). He said that working through that deal brought the two companies, who have often fought bitterly, “a lot closer.” Comcast is in discussions with several other video streaming providers to integrate their services into the X1 box, Mr. Roberts said. — *Wall Street Journal*; [more from Philadelphia Inquirer](#)

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AT&T Tuesday announced new technology it says has the potential to deliver “low cost, ultra-fast multi-gigabit per second wireless internet speeds” using existing infrastructure — power lines. The technology “has the potential to transform Internet access globally, well beyond the AT&T footprint,” delivering speedy wireless connectivity to homes and wireless devices all around the world. It’s performed “extremely well” in AT&T’s internal tests, so the company is now gearing up to see how it works in the real world and plans to soon announce AirGig market trials in select cities and countries.

Designed and tested by AT&T Labs inventors over the last decade, broadband over power lines is said to be easier and cheaper to deploy than fiber because it runs over license-free spectrum and doesn’t require new towers or underground cables. AT&T is serious about this — the company already has more than 100 patents or patent applications supporting AirGig and other access technologies.

In a [blog post Opens a New Window.](#), AT&T explained that it’s “experimenting with multiple ways to send a modulated radio signal around or near medium-voltage power lines,”

adding that the technology does not require a direct electrical connection to the line — a major factor hampering similar technologies [in the past Opens a New Window.](#) As part of the project, AT&T invented low-cost plastic antennas and devices to create an electromagnetic field that guides waves alongside the power line, not through it. The resulting millimeter wave signals can "enable ultra-fast connection nearly anywhere." "We think we've come up with an approach that we believe will be unique in our industry," the company wrote.

Utility companies, AT&T says, could benefit via early detection of power line problems, such as encroaching tree branches. At this point, AT&T is "deep in the experimentation phase," and hopes to kick off its first AirGig field trials in 2017. "The results we've seen from our outdoor labs testing have been encouraging, especially as you think about where we're heading in a 5G world," AT&T Technology and Operations Chief Strategy Officer and Group President John Donovan said in a statement. "To that end, we're looking at the right global location to trial this new technology next year." – PC Magazine

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Google Fiber scored a major victory Tuesday in its effort to expand to Nashville, netting final Metro Council approval of a proposal known as One Touch Make Ready that the company has made the focal point of its gigabit internet rollout here. But while the council's action — which came by a voice vote — caps weeks of intense debate and failed negotiations surrounding utility pole attachment methods, it probably sets the stage for a legal battle. Executives from AT&T, which sued Louisville, Ky., after it passed a similar ordinance, have made clear that Nashville [can expect a lawsuit](#) if One Touch Make Ready becomes law.

Supporters of Google Fiber have framed the issue as allowing more competition against existing providers Comcast and AT&T, which have both opposed the measure. The council's top proponents pushed that theme Tuesday. "Davidson County can be swiftly outfitted with fiber infrastructure no matter the carrier, with speed," Councilman Anthony Davis, a co-sponsor of the ordinance, said ahead of the vote. "It is great policy. It is simply common sense and it makes Nashville a premier internet and technology city."

The council's approval Tuesday came after it first voted 26-12 to defeat a proposal from Antioch-area Councilwoman Tanaka Vercher, a critic of the measure, to delay voting for two meetings. She said the council needed more information on how Google plans to pick which communities it will serve. A similar deferral effort was narrowly defeated by the council two weeks ago. The ordinance now heads to the desk of Mayor Megan Barry, who has refrained from taking an up-or-down position on One Touch Make Ready, seeking compromise among providers. Nevertheless, she plans to sign the bill into law.

"One Touch Make Ready appears to be a common-sense way of speeding up the deployment of high-speed internet throughout Davidson County," Barry said in a statement. "Unfortunately, the likelihood of protracted litigation could delay implementation of this law designed to benefit Nashville's consumers," she said. "That is why I encouraged fiber providers to work together on a solution they could all agree upon, which they were not able to do. My hope now is that any potential legal disputes over this new law can be resolved quickly, and we can move forward with expanding fiber access throughout the city."

At issue is [how utility poles are made ready](#) for new providers. When a new line is added to a pole, each existing line must be moved by its owner, a process that can take months per line. Google Fiber sought to expedite the process by allowing one approved contractor to move all the lines at once, a policy change that would reduce traffic and sidewalk disruption, the company argued. Chris Levandos, Google Fiber director of national deployment and operations, praised the outcome of Tuesday's meeting, saying it "will allow new entrants like Google Fiber to bring broadband to more Nashvillians efficiently, safely and quickly."

AT&T, among other arguments, has pointed to contracts with union workers that would be violated by the legislation. Comcast says that One Touch Make Ready puts workers' safety at risk and could lead to service disruptions for consumers. "As we have emphasized throughout this debate, the 'One-Touch' policy is not a good solution for faster deployment of infrastructure," AT&T Tennessee President Joelle Phillips said in an emailed statement. "We appreciate the efforts of council members and representatives of NES, Public Works, Metro Legal and Comcast who invested the time to discuss better alternatives and to collect accurate facts. That's the Nashville way, and that's how we should work together on the many tech policy issues that will arise as technology — and the way we all use that technology — continues to rapidly evolve."

Comcast officials also said they were disappointed by the vote and that the company would evaluate whether "further proceedings" were necessary. "Throughout this process, Comcast has been committed to working with all stakeholders in Nashville on a collaborative solution to improve broadband deployment processes," Comcast spokeswoman Sara Jo Walker said in an emailed statement. "We thank the councilmembers who were willing to take a deep look at the risks associated with, and inaccuracies of 'One Touch' and stand up for a better solution that is beneficial for all consumers."

At-large Councilman Bob Mendes, who voted against the One Touch Make Ready bill, cited the need for a solution with "better balance." He bemoaned that the issue has been portrayed in the media and council "as a black and white, soundbite-driven sort of a debate where you're either a good guy or the bad guy. You're either pro-technology or anti-technology. "That's sort of reductionist politics," he said. "I don't think it should have a place here. There is a better way forward."

The council also voted 25-14 to defeat a nonbinding resolution proposed by Councilwoman Sheri Weiner that sought to create tighter deadlines on make-ready work and add penalties to providers that did not adhere to them. To reach that goal, it sought a memorandum of understanding among providers. Weiner said she introduced the resolution so that "everyone can take a deep breath to see if we can come up with a comprehensive solution," but Google Fiber's proponents argued the resolution would bind Metro government moving forward. Google Fiber representatives said the company would not sign the memorandum of understanding.

In its effort to defeat One Touch Make Ready, Comcast and AT&T had proposed changes to the existing make-ready process, but bill sponsors said those adjustments did little to address the delays and allowed existing providers to serve as "gatekeepers" of competition. Companies now appear to be preparing for a legal fight. Fleur Knowlsey, senior counsel of Alphabet's Access group, in a letter to council members and city attorneys Monday, offered to share the company's in-house and outside attorneys to help Metro fight future litigation from AT&T. AT&T Tennessee recently tapped high-profile Nashville attorney Bill Harbison to join the company's legal team. — **Nashville Tennessean**



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