
CTIA Warns on Technical Concerns on Beefed-Up WEAs, Which DC Also Seeks

CTIA warned the FCC on potential technical concerns with requiring carriers to transmit multimedia files in wireless emergency alerts, responding to a Public Safety Bureau notice to update the record (see [1803280029](#) and [1805290059](#)). The commission should "recognize the significant technical and operational limitations -- both with wireless networks and WEA-capable devices -- that would be very challenging to overcome," [said](#) comments in docket 15-91. CTIA noted the FCC now requires carriers to support the transmission of embedded URLs and phone numbers in alerts: "The WEA system was intentionally designed to transmit only very small amounts of text data to ensure the timely delivery of WEA messages." Even with successful tests January and April in the National Capital Region (see [1804050053](#)), WEA requires multimedia enhancements, [commented](#) the District of Columbia Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency. "While both of these tests demonstrated our ability to provide key information to Washington, DC's residents, commuters, and guests, our WEA messaging was limited by the technical constraints of the WEA system." Support for images would "provide instant recognition and speak a universal language," while making WEA more accessible to people with disabilities, it said. Other commenters also asked the FCC to move forward. Despite recent enhancements, "significant gaps remain between what today's technology can offer and what the WEA System supports," [said](#) New York City's Emergency Management Department. "Chief among these gaps is the inability to incorporate multimedia (e.g., images, maps, infographics, etc.) into WEA messages. The need for this capability within the WEA System has been thoroughly documented in the public record." The Santa Barbara County Office of Emergency Management [said](#) the lack of multimedia capability made WEAs less effective during recent wildfires and flooding in California. Multimedia WEA messages "would be of tremendous benefit to the deaf and hard of hearing," [said](#) groups representing that community, led by Telecommunications for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. "While multimedia capabilities provide significant benefit to all recipients, they offer special and unique benefits to the deaf and hard of hearing population many of whom rely on visual information for emergency and nonemergency information." Other industry commenters share CTIA's concerns. ATIS said it remains "concerned with the congestion-related impacts" of URLs now required by the FCC. Industry needs time to see how including embedded URLs work, the group [said](#). "The use of URLs with appropriate best practices (e.g. well-designed website links) is the only effective means of providing multimedia in WEA today," ATIS said. AT&T [raised](#) technological concerns. "The

arrival of 5G will not alter the WEA technology roadmap -- cell broadcast is and will remain the primary way to send WEA messages," AT&T said. "Cell broadcast technology, which is optimized for text messages, will be extremely challenged to support multimedia messages -- even smaller files like static photos, much less video files." Proposals have emerged that images be converted to binary data and sent over multiple cell broadcast messages, the carrier said. "This would require significant standards development, for both the network and handsets, and would require new handsets, introducing backwards compatibility and roaming challenges."

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