

Impact of CBRS Spectrum on 5G Network Deployment

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ABSTRACT

The Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) band in the United States, particularly the 3.5 GHz frequency range, has emerged as a pivotal asset in accelerating 5G deployment. This paper explores the strategic approaches and inherent challenges associated with implementing CBRS spectrum for 5G networks. By leveraging shared access models and spectrum management frameworks, CBRS provides opportunities for both mobile network operators and private network implementers. This study reviews the current state of CBRS integration in 5G, highlights the primary deployment strategies, and discusses challenges in regulatory, technical, and economic domains.

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Introduction

The rapid demand for enhanced connectivity has highlighted the potential of the Citizens Broadband Radio Service (CBRS) spectrum as a crucial component for the deployment of 5G networks. CBRS, operating in the 3.5 GHz band, aligns with 5G's mid-band spectrum requirements, offering a balance between capacity and range, making it well-suited for high-density urban deployments. Reallocated by the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to support a shared access model, CBRS provides a dynamic solution to the scarcity of traditional licensed spectrum. Through a unique three-tiered access structure, CBRS allows for coexistence between federal incumbents, licensed Priority Access License (PAL) holders, and General Authorized Access (GAA) users. This tiered structure, enforced by a Spectrum Access System (SAS), ensures efficient spectrum sharing while minimizing interference, which is essential for the performance-sensitive demands of 5G applications.

This paper investigates the strategic benefits and implementation challenges associated with integrating CBRS into 5G deployment strategies. Key advantages include the flexibility to support private 5G networks for enterprises, enhanced spectrum access for mobile network operators, and a cost-effective alternative for expanding 5G coverage in underserved areas. However, challenges remain in managing coexistence with federal and licensed users, achieving device compatibility, and addressing regulatory complexities. By examining current CBRS use cases and analyzing technical and regulatory hurdles, this study contributes to understanding CBRS's potential to act as a scalable, shared spectrum solution for next-generation network deployment [1].

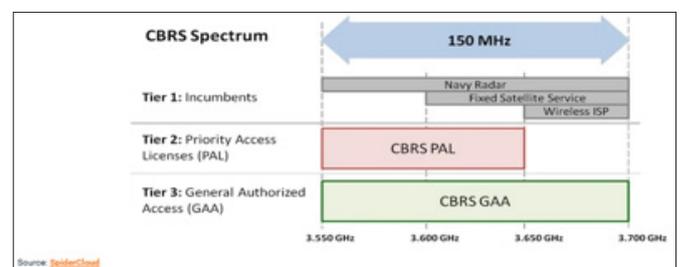


Figure 1: CBRS Spectrum Availability [5]

CBRS Spectrum Governance and Operational Structure

The CBRS (Citizens Broadband Radio Service) spectrum, operating in the 3.5 GHz band (3550-3700 MHz), follows a unique governance structure designed to support diverse applications, including government, commercial, and general use. Its three-tiered model, managed by a Spectrum Access System (SAS), prioritizes and allocates spectrum access based on a predefined order [6-10].

- Incumbent Access:** This top-priority tier reserves access for the federal government, particularly for military operations and radar systems along the U.S. coasts. The SAS, supported by Environmental Sensing Capabilities (ESC), detects incumbent activity in real-time, ensuring the reallocation of other users when necessary. This framework is essential to protect government use while accommodating commercial applications [11].
- Priority Access License (PAL):** PAL is the middle tier and is allocated to licensed users, including mobile network operators, through an auction process. Licensees obtain access to specific channels within the band, ensuring prioritized usage over the general public while maintaining a defined interference protection threshold. This tier typically supports private networks for enterprises or network operators seeking to deploy 5G infrastructure in dense areas.
- General Authorized Access (GAA):** The lowest tier, GAA, provides unlicensed access to the remaining available channels in the CBRS band. Any entity can use GAA on a "use-it-or-lose-

it" basis, with access granted only when PAL and incumbent demands are met. This level of accessibility makes CBRS a cost-effective option for local networks, such as those for rural broadband and enterprise environments.

Feature	Incumbent Access	Priority Access License (PAL)	General Authorized Access (GAA)
User Type	Government and military	Licensed entities (e.g., mobile operators)	General public (unlicensed access)
Access Rights	Highest priority	Priority over GAA, interference-protected	Opportunistic, subject to availability
Management	ESC + SAS	Managed by SAS, based on auctioned licenses	SAS-managed, open to all when channels are free
Use Cases	National security	Enterprise private networks, urban 5G networks	Rural broadband, local business connectivity
Interference Protection	Full protection	Protected from GAA interference	No protection, secondary to PAL and incumbent

Figure 2: Difference Between Various Spectrum Accesses

Strategic Importance of CBRS in 5G Deployment

The CBRS spectrum plays a critical role in the success of 5G, particularly in addressing the "mid-band gap" between low-band and high-frequency mmWave spectrum. CBRS enhances network flexibility and scalability, allowing operators to efficiently offload traffic from licensed spectrum, thus enhancing overall network performance and coverage. CBRS also provides an opportunity for enterprises to establish private 5G networks cost-effectively, enabling applications such as industrial automation, IoT, and smart city deployments. By reducing reliance on traditional mobile operators and lowering entry barriers, the CBRS framework democratizes access to valuable mid-band spectrum, allowing new and smaller players to innovate within the 5G ecosystem. Additionally, it facilitates rural connectivity by offering an affordable solution for high-speed internet in underserved areas [3].

With a unique governance structure and spectrum access model in place, CBRS enables a range of deployment strategies that can be tailored to meet diverse operational needs. The following section explores these optimized deployment strategies, demonstrating how the CBRS framework supports public and private 5G applications.

Deployment Strategies for CBRS

Augmenting Public Networks with CBRS Spectrum

Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) are increasingly incorporating CBRS into their networks to supplement licensed spectrum and handle high-traffic areas more effectively. The three tier CBRS framework allows MNOs to offload data onto CBRS frequencies, especially in densely populated urban centers. Leveraging both Priority Access Licenses (PALs) and General Authorized Access (GAA) tiers, MNOs can expand capacity and alleviate network congestion on their primary, licensed spectrum. This augmentation strategy is technically significant because it ensures better user experience and Quality of Service (QoS) by balancing loads across multiple bands. For example, by dynamically managing traffic across PAL, GAA, and licensed spectrum, operators can sustain performance during peak hours, optimizing spectrum efficiency and addressing the growing demand for 5G services.

CBRS Integration for Network Augmentation:

- MNOs are using CBRS to offload data in high-traffic urban

areas, enhancing network efficiency by supplementing licensed spectrum with CBRS's three-tier system: Priority Access Licenses (PALs), General Authorized Access (GAA), and Incumbent Access (IA).

- CBRS allows operators to balancing load and reducing congestion, especially during peak hours, ensuring better Quality of Service (QoS) and network performance, hence ensuring a more resilient and scalable network.

Interference Mitigation Techniques for Urban CBRS Deployments

The Spectrum Access System (SAS) is central to managing interference within the CBRS framework. SAS dynamically coordinates frequency assignments to ensure that incumbent, Priority Access License (PAL), and General Authorized Access (GAA) users operate with minimal interference. By monitoring real-time spectrum usage, SAS algorithms can prioritize access and adjust frequency allocations across the three user tiers as network demand fluctuates.

- Real-Time Environmental Sensing Capabilities (ESCs):** To prevent interference with incumbent users, especially along coastal areas, the SAS relies on Environmental Sensing Capabilities (ESCs) to detect federal incumbents' use of the spectrum. Upon detection, the SAS system dynamically reallocates GAA and PAL users to alternate channels, preventing interference with priority signals.
- Dynamic Channel Reassignment:** SAS can assign channels dynamically, reallocating spectrum to CBRS networks based on real-time traffic demands and potential interference patterns. For example, in scenarios where multiple GAA users are causing interference, SAS may allocate different channels to these networks or adjust power levels to reduce signal overlap.

As SAS technology continues to evolve, interference management will likely become more predictive and autonomous, further enhancing CBRS's capabilities in complex urban environments [18].

Private 5G Networks via CBRS for Enterprise Applications

CBRS is trans formative for enterprises that require private 5G networks tailored to specific operational demands, such as Internet of Things (IoT) connectivity and real-time automation,. This setup is particularly beneficial for industries like manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics, where dedicated, high-performance wireless networks enable low-latency, secure communications for critical applications. With CBRS, enterprises can avoid the high costs and dependency associated with traditional licensed spectrum, allowing them to deploy private networks with granular control over network parameters. This has encouraged innovation in sectors requiring autonomous operations, as CBRS-based private networks offer not only greater security but also reliability for mission-critical use cases [2,12].

- Benefits Across Industries:** Industries such as manufacturing, healthcare, and logistics benefit from low-latency, secure communications, enabling mission-critical applications and autonomous operations.
- Cost-Effective and Flexible:** CBRS reduces dependency on expensive licensed spectrum, providing an affordable solution with scalability and the flexibility to customize networks as needed.
- Enhanced Security and Reliability:** Offers dedicated, secure networks with consistent performance, crucial for industries requiring high-reliability and data privacy for critical tasks.

Hybrid Network Models: Bridging Public and Private 5G

Hybrid network models offer a strategic fusion of public and private 5G network elements, which is particularly valuable for enterprise applications. This architecture leverages the flexibility of the CBRS's shared spectrum by allowing Mobile Network Operators (MNOs) and enterprises to optimize resources according to their specific connectivity needs. MNOs can extend their public 5G infrastructure to enterprise environments, while enterprises can use private CBRS channels to meet mission-critical requirements, such as low latency and high security, for specific applications. This dual-network approach is advantageous in sectors like healthcare, where private CBRS frequencies are used for sensitive medical IoT operations, and public 5G serves more general connectivity demands for staff and patients.

Hybrid models benefit from dynamic spectrum allocation enabled by CBRS's tiered access system, which mitigates interference and enhances Quality of Service (QoS). Key components such as Environmental Sensing Capability (ESC) sensors and the Spectrum Access System (SAS) dynamically manage spectrum access, ensuring priority for critical applications without compromising the availability of public resources. This adaptability aligns with 5G's network slicing objectives by allowing MNOs to partition resources across diverse usage scenarios. Additionally, hybrid models support seamless handover between private and public 5G, enhancing user experience and enabling scalable, on-demand resource management that addresses the fluctuations in user density and bandwidth requirements [5].

- Hybrid Network Models combine public and private 5G elements, optimizing resources for enterprise needs.
- CBRS Spectrum allows MNOs to extend public 5G infrastructure while enterprises use private CBRS for low latency and high security.
- In healthcare, private CBRS supports sensitive IoT applications, while public 5G covers general connectivity for staff and patients.
- Dynamic spectrum allocation via CBRS's tiered access system ensures QoS by managing interference and prioritizing critical applications.
- The model supports 5G network slicing, allowing resource partitioning for different scenarios and enabling seamless handovers between private and public networks.

Spectrum Leasing and Strategic Partnerships

CBRS's innovative spectrum leasing framework empowers license holders, primarily Priority Access License (PAL) owners, to lease spectrum to third parties on a short-term or on-demand basis. This flexibility fosters collaborations across industry verticals, enabling enterprises to access high-quality spectrum resources without the capital expenditure of securing dedicated spectrum rights. For example, manufacturing facilities can lease PAL spectrum temporarily for high-bandwidth IoT applications, while enterprises in urban settings might lease CBRS bands for pop-up networks during events or emergencies, where reliable connectivity is essential.

Technically, spectrum leasing is facilitated through the SAS, which dynamically allocates CBRS channels based on real-time spectrum availability and regulatory requirements. This setup allows for automated management of PALs and General Authorized Access (GAA) users, optimizing spectrum efficiency. Partnerships between MNOs, neutral hosts, and enterprises are essential in this model, with infrastructure providers enabling faster deployment and interoperability across leased and native spectrums. The ability

to manage and provision spectrum resources in real-time supports rapid scalability and agile deployment models, vital for 5G rollouts in dense urban areas and enterprise environments.

Main points to consider here are:

- **Spectrum Leasing in CBRS:**
Priority Access License (PAL) holders can lease spectrum to third parties on a short-term or demand-based basis. This flexibility enables collaborations across various industries, allowing enterprises to access high-quality spectrum without significant capital expenditure.
- **Use Case Examples:**
Manufacturing facilities can lease PAL spectrum for high-bandwidth IoT applications. Enterprises in urban settings can lease CBRS bands for temporary networks during events or emergencies where reliable connectivity is crucial.
- **Technical Framework:**
Spectrum leasing is facilitated by the SAS (Spectrum Access System), which dynamically allocates CBRS channels based on real-time availability and regulatory requirements. Automated management of PALs and General Authorized Access (GAA) users optimizes spectrum efficiency.
- **Strategic Partnerships:**
Collaborations between MNOs (Mobile Network Operators), neutral hosts, and enterprise stakeholders are key for fast deployment and interoperability across leased and native spectrums. The ability to manage and provision spectrum in real-time supports rapid scalability and agile deployment, especially crucial for 5G rollouts in dense urban areas and enterprise environments. While CBRS offers multiple deployment approaches to enhance 5G networks, each approach presents unique challenges that must be managed effectively to maximize network performance.

Environmental and Infrastructure Impact of CBRS Deployment

The deployment of CBRS (Citizens Broadband Radio Service) to support 5G networks involves extensive infrastructure, particularly with the addition of small cells and base stations. CBRS operates within the 3.5 GHz mid-band frequency range, which balances range and capacity but often requires higher density of network nodes—especially in urban environments to maintain consistent coverage and performance.

Urban Environments

In densely populated urban areas, CBRS deployments demand high network density to support data-intensive applications and a large number of users. Small cells, which are compact base stations with lower transmission power than traditional macro towers, become essential for urban CBRS networks. These small cells can be deployed on street furniture, building facades, or utility poles. However, this approach increases the environmental footprint, as each cell site requires power, backhaul connections, and secure housing, which can impact urban aesthetics and create challenges in regulatory compliance.

From an environmental perspective, a high density of small cells may also increase energy consumption, particularly as the demand for network traffic grows. While each small cell individually consumes less power than a macro base station, the cumulative energy requirement across a dense urban area can be significant.

Rural Environments

In contrast, rural deployments typically focus on achieving

maximum coverage with fewer infrastructure resources due to lower population density and reduced network demand. Macro base stations are more commonly used in rural CBRS deployments to provide wider coverage per site. However, the mid-band CBRS spectrum can face limitations in range and penetration through foliage or rugged terrain, which may necessitate supplemental infrastructure such as repeaters or relay stations to maintain signal continuity in challenging landscapes.

Environmental considerations in rural deployments also include the ecological impact of constructing larger towers, which may disrupt local habitats or require land clearance. In addition, these deployments must consider the challenges of power availability, particularly in remote areas where access to reliable power and high-speed backhaul options can be limited.

The balance between network performance and environmental impact requires careful consideration in CBRS deployments. For instance, while small cells in urban areas can improve network performance by increasing data throughput and reducing latency, they also add to the infrastructure footprint. Conversely, macro cells in rural deployments reduce the number of physical sites but may not offer the same level of performance enhancements, especially for data-intensive applications. The subsequent section will examine the key challenges associated with CBRS deployment and offer insights into addressing these hurdles.

Key Challenges

As CBRS adoption grows, several key challenges must be addressed for successful deployment. These include managing spectrum complexity, protecting incumbent operations, mitigating interference, and ensuring adequate coverage. Economic concerns like high initial costs and uncertain ROI, along with security issues related to data privacy and dynamic spectrum sharing, also need careful consideration. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for maximizing CBRS's potential in supporting innovative, mission-critical applications [7].

Regulatory and Policy Constraints

Spectrum Management Complexity: The SAS needs to continuously monitor and manage the priority tiers, requiring robust coordination to avoid interference.

Incumbent Protection: CBRS deployments are constrained near coastal areas and other regions to avoid interference with incumbent (e.g., military) operations, limiting availability in certain regions [16].

Interference Management

Effective interference mitigation within the SAS is essential but challenging, particularly in dense urban environments where CBRS usage is high.

Coverage Limitations: The 3.5 GHz band provides a middle ground between capacity and range, but still requires denser deployment of infrastructure compared to low-band frequencies [4].

Economic Considerations

High Initial Costs: Private networks using CBRS require upfront investment in infrastructure, SAS fees, and possibly PALs, which may be prohibitively high for smaller organizations.

Return on Investment (ROI): Although CBRS can reduce network costs over time, the ROI remains uncertain, especially for sectors with variable connectivity demands [13].

Scalability and Integration Challenges

Infrastructure Expansion: Scaling CBRS networks can require significant infrastructure expansion, especially in regions with high user density or challenging geography.

Integration with Legacy Systems: Integrating CBRS with existing network infrastructures and legacy systems can be complex, requiring coordination across different technologies and network layers to ensure seamless operation.

Case Studies

To further illustrate CBRS's impact and versatility, the following case studies provide real-world examples of CBRS deployments in various sectors, highlighting its effectiveness in augmenting public and private networks. In the context of urban IoT networks, maintaining Quality of Service (QoS) is paramount, especially for applications requiring real-time data transmission, such as smart transportation systems, healthcare monitoring, and public safety communications. These applications often operate under strict performance metrics, necessitating low latency, high reliability, and adequate bandwidth to ensure effective service delivery.

CBRS in Urban 5G Networks (New York City)

- **Network Densification:** CBRS enables the offloading of traffic from congested licensed spectrum, particularly in high-density urban areas like New York City. This helps alleviate network congestion during peak hours, improving overall network efficiency.
- **Capacity Expansion:** The 3.5 GHz CBRS band provides additional capacity to urban 5G networks, offering a balance between range and data throughput. This makes it ideal for densely populated areas, where low-band spectrum might be too congested and higher-band frequencies might have limited range.
- **Dynamic Spectrum Sharing:** The integration of SAS-managed spectrum in urban 5G networks allows dynamic adjustment of spectrum resources based on real-time demand and availability, ensuring optimal performance during heavy traffic.
- **User Experience:** It can highlight measured improvements in latency, throughput, and network stability for users in high-traffic zones, showing how CBRS mitigates congestion and supports seamless 5G experiences [14].

Private 5G in Manufacturing

- **IoT Connectivity:** CBRS enables low-latency communication between machines and IoT devices within a private 5G network, critical for manufacturing environments that require real-time data exchange for automation and monitoring.
- **Private Network Customization:** The manufacturing facility utilized GAA spectrum to create a private network that offers greater control over bandwidth allocation, security, and performance. This allows for optimization tailored to the specific needs of the operation, such as sensor data transmission, remote monitoring, and equipment automation.
- **Automation and Monitoring:** With CBRS, the manufacturing facility integrated remote monitoring systems and robotic automation, which depend on consistent, reliable connectivity. This minimizes downtime and increases operational efficiency.
- **Cost Benefits:** The case study could show how CBRS's cost-effective private network solution avoided high costs associated with traditional licensed spectrum, enabling the facility to scale without significant upfront costs [9, 15].

Healthcare Applications

- **Telemedicine:** CBRS-powered private 5G networks provide secure, high-bandwidth connectivity for telemedicine applications, enabling high-quality video consultations and real-time health data exchange between patients and doctors, even in remote areas.
- **IoT Medical Devices:** Hospitals use CBRS to connect a wide range of IoT medical devices (e.g., patient monitors, infusion pumps) within a private network. This ensures low-latency communication and continuous, uninterrupted data flow to the hospital's central systems for real time patient monitoring.
- **Data Security:** The private nature of CBRS networks ensures that patient data is securely transmitted within hospital facilities, helping meet compliance requirements such as HIPAA (Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act) in the U.S.
- **Network Reliability:** CBRS helps hospitals maintain high availability of critical healthcare applications by reducing reliance on public networks, ensuring that telemedicine services and medical device connectivity remain uninterrupted during peak usage times.
- **Case Study Metrics:** The analysis could include quantitative data such as improvements in telemedicine usage rates, device uptime, or patient outcomes, showcasing how CBRS supports healthcare innovation.

Future Directions

As the role of CBRS in 5G networks solidifies, ongoing advancements and regulatory shifts are shaping its future potential. The next section discusses emerging trends and future directions for CBRS, including policy evolution, SAS technology enhancements, and standardization efforts to support its integration into next-generation networks.

Policy Evolution

As the demand for 5G networks continues to grow, there is a need for regulatory adjustments to optimize the use of CBRS. Potential changes could involve expanding the eligibility for Priority Access Licenses (PALs) or introducing more flexible rules around incumbent protection. This could allow for more efficient spectrum sharing, particularly in high demand areas. Furthermore, as the success of CBRS becomes more evident in the U.S., international markets are exploring similar shared spectrum models to improve spectrum utilization and reduce costs. Global alignment on policy could promote the growth of private 5G networks and foster innovation in emerging markets, creating more opportunities for global cooperation in spectrum management.

Enhanced SAS Technology

The Spectrum Access System (SAS) is crucial for managing spectrum use in CBRS, ensuring coordination among PAL holders, GAA users, and incumbent users to prevent interference. Future advancements in SAS algorithms could lead to more precise real-time monitoring, allowing for dynamic spectrum management with better handling of interference. These improvements would allow for higher levels of spectrum reuse, increasing the overall efficiency of the spectrum. Enhanced SAS infrastructure could also support more dense deployments, improving network reliability in urban environments and reducing latency, which is essential for mission-critical applications in sectors such as healthcare and manufacturing [17].

Standardization for Interoperability

One of the challenges of scaling CBRS networks is the compatibility between different private 5G solutions and network equipment. To

address this, efforts to standardize protocols and technology would be highly beneficial. Ensuring that CBRS-compatible equipment from various manufacturers can work seamlessly together would simplify integration for enterprises adopting private 5G networks. Standardization would also streamline the deployment process, reduce costs, and improve the interoperability of devices across industries. It could also lead to better device performance and help to ensure that CBRS can be implemented consistently across different environments, from urban centers to remote industrial sites.

Conclusion

The implementation of CBRS for 5G offers significant advantages for both public and private networks by enabling efficient spectrum sharing. It allows operators to offload traffic onto Priority Access Licenses (PALs) and General Authorized Access (GAA), helping alleviate congestion on traditional licensed spectrum. CBRS also facilitates private 5G networks for industries like manufacturing, healthcare, and IoT, providing high-speed, low-latency connectivity with greater control over network parameters. However, challenges remain in terms of regulatory constraints, particularly with incumbent protection near sensitive areas, and the technical complexity of managing interference in urban environments.

Economically, CBRS deployments require significant initial investment, making it difficult for smaller organizations to enter the market. While the long-term benefits of CBRS are clear, such as cost savings and scalability, the ROI for certain sectors with fluctuating demand remains uncertain. As CBRS matures, overcoming these regulatory, technical, and economic challenges will be key to unlocking its full potential. If successfully addressed, CBRS could serve as a global model for shared spectrum use, significantly advancing 5G adoption worldwide.

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