TO: Federal Communications Commission
FR: R.E.M.
RE: Comment on Net Neutrality/Preserving the Open Internet NPRM (09-191)
DT: January 8, 2010

It's the early days in R.E.M.'s evolution from local bar band to pioneers of the college-radio and independent music scene. Somewhere on Clayton Street in Athens, Georgia there's a telephone, a fax machine, a few ballpoint pens, a copier, a book of stamps, and all hands on deck stuffing envelopes, applying postage and labels preparing the latest issue of the R.E.M. Fan Club newsletter — soon on its way out to the three thousand fans across the world who have paid their $10 subscription fee to keep in touch with their favorite band. In a week or two, they'll have the "Latest Word" in their hands and will know that the band is working on a new record and planning a tour. The next issue, due out in three-months' time, will reveal more of the picture, and everyone, presumably, will feel grateful that they know before the rest of the world. These were the days of Xerox copies and homemade fanzines, self-addressed stamped envelopes, carbon sheets in triplicate, brother typewriters and desk calendars. From the standpoint of communication, they were good only in that one had nothing with which to compare them. Interaction with fans was almost always by snail mail and rarely instantaneous unless it was face-to-face at an in-store signing or a chance meeting on the street.

Fast-forward twenty to thirty odd years to the present. The desk calendars and rolodexes have been replaced by computers and iPhones. Today, just like every band in the second decade of this millennium, R.E.M. is armed to the hilt with the latest of the requisite web-based tools, which makes communication with fans not only easy but also fast. It's a structure dependent on bandwidth, website hits, downloads, Twitter accounts, blogs, fansites, RSS feeds, Facebook and Myspace pages, apps, You Tube channels, Feedjit, and HTML newsletters. And while the phone, the fax, the copier, and the postal meter are still in service, they're but a small part of the overall effort to get the music and message out and into the hands of those who want it.

Combined, all of these things, old and new, make it possible to conduct business efficiently and effectively. Nonetheless, minus open access to the convenience and immediacy of the web-based social networking tools, it's not so hard to imagine a return to a time when they weren't around. So let's preserve this seamless flow of information between artist and fan and recognize that Net Neutrality is critical to the conservation of this dynamic. It doesn't matter if you're a band or a blogger: the open internet provides access to the same platform for communication as a large corporation or even a government agency. R.E.M. opposes any strictures that would prohibit this access.