

Data Limits and Data Services on Radio Multiplexes

Arqiva welcomes the opportunity to comment on the timely consultation 'Data Limits and Data Services on Radio Multiplexes'.

About Arqiva

Arqiva has a 50-year history in transmission and has helped pioneer the technologies of the digital age. Formerly the broadcast division of ntl Group, Arqiva was purchased in 2005 by an international consortium led by Macquarie Communications Infrastructure Group.

Arqiva owns and operates some 350 FM and 70 MF transmitters, with customers ranging from the large radio groups such as GWR, EMAP, Chrysalis, Capital and Scottish Radio Holdings, to small community-based stations.

Arqiva has also played a leading role in the development and introduction of digital radio in the UK, supporting the commercial radio industry in making the transition from analogue. We have acted as technical partner to Now Digital, Capital Radio Digital, EMAP Digital, CE Digital, Score Digital and MXR Ltd in their licence applications.

Arqiva also built the transmission network for Digital One, the national commercial DAB multiplex, and has multiplexing and transmission contracts for 42 of the 46 local and regional DAB multiplexes.

Arqiva is also providing the infrastructure for the Mobile TV Now! DMB/DAB-IP trial currently on air in London.

Comments on the consultation

Arqiva supports both proposals set out in the consultation; the first, expanding the definition of a 'television licensable content service (TLCS) under the communications Act 2003 to include TV carried on a radio multiplex, and the second, an increase to the maximum proportion of the capacity on a radio multiplex that could be used for data services from 20% to 30%.

Arqiva agrees that mobile TV is a very attractive proposition for both broadcasters and consumers, as demonstrated by the BT Movio pilot in early 2006. Arqiva also notes the consumer enthusiasm for the mobile TV services being offered by DMB in Germany alongside the World Cup.

With participants in the BT Movio pilot consuming more DAB than TV, radio broadcasters can effectively extend their audience reach by capturing the attention of their listeners on the move with an even more intimate medium than the traditional radio receiver at home.

Arqiva believes that by expanding the definition of the TLCS a mix of audio, TV and data services will be made available, helping to re-position DAB as part of a new, innovative multimedia package, hence encouraging consumer take-up of DAB-enabled devices. The ability to use the capacity on a DAB multiplex for a mobile TV service and other data applications will introduce new revenue streams increasing the flexibility available to, and hence financial viability of, multiplex operators and will support further investment in digital radio services.

New data applications will emerge over the next few years as further research and technical trials are conducted. The launch of the Mobile TV Now! UK trial this month will investigate how DAB-IP and DMB can be used for broadcast television and other multimedia applications. With the anticipated availability of additional Band III spectrum later this year for DAB and L-Band spectrum in 2007 there is an opportunity now to develop applications that complement existing digital audio services to provide even more choice for the listener and support a compelling business case for the broadcasters to continue their investment in DAB. These services will only be commercially viable if sufficient capacity is made available.

Arqiva therefore supports an increase in the data limit to 30% which we believe would strike the appropriate balance between protecting the primary purpose of the multiplex licence whilst encouraging the introduction of associated data services to meet market demand.

Arqiva understands the Government's concerns that increasing the data limit could potentially lead to a reduction in audio quality of some existing DAB radio services, or even a reduction in the number of such services offered to consumers. However, Arqiva believes that the needs and interests of the consumers will remain protected by the current terms of the multiplex licence. Arqiva also recognise that the continual improvement in audio coding technology should permit more efficient use of a multiplex's bandwidth, enabling operators to be more flexible with the mix of audio and data services provided whilst complying with the terms of their licence.

It is also expected that, shortly after the conclusion of the current Regional Radiocommunication Conference, Ofcom will start the process to award the licence for the second commercial national DAB multiplex, which will greatly increase the bandwidth available overall for radio services, television and data.

Arqiva welcomes Ofcom's flexibility in accepting the temporary broadcasting of a radio service on the Digital One multiplex in mono to help to ensure the viability of BT Movio's television offering.

Yours Sincerely

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Arqiva