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## **FCC Rulemaking to Permit AM Stations to Operate FM Translators**

**August 17, 2007**

**From: Peter Gutmann**

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The FCC has proposed amending its rules to allow AM broadcast stations to be rebroadcast on FM translators, but only as a fill-in service.

The rulemaking is in response to a request by the National Association of Broadcasters and many supporting comments. The specific proposal is to enable AM stations to rebroadcast their signals over FM translators, whether owned outright or time brokered, provided that the translator's 60 dBu contour does not extend beyond either the AM station's 2 mV/m daytime contour or a 25 mile radius from the AM transmitter site.

The Commission notes that in eleven cases so far it has waived its current rules to allow an AM station to be rebroadcast over a previously authorized FM translator station through a grant of special temporary authority. The Commission has empowered its Media Bureau to continue to grant such authority on a case-by-case basis, consistent with the present proposal and subject to the outcome of this proceeding.

The Commission salutes AM as "an important component of the mass media landscape and a vital provider of local broadcast service," especially in rural areas. The Commission notes that AM promotes its commitment to localism by providing substantial news/talk, sports, foreign language, religious, political, public affairs, emergency and community event programming. The Commission believes that the NAB proposal will help to ensure the continued viability and survival of the AM service.

The Commission recognizes that since first authorizing FM translators in 1970 it rejected similar suggestions to permit AM primary stations in each of the next two decades. Nonetheless, the Commission now appears to have acknowledged that the vitality of AM broadcasting has been threatened by the shift of listeners to newer mass media of superior technical quality and reliability, and that its prior steps toward revitalization are insufficient to overcome the inherent propagation and interference limitations of the AM band.

Among the aspects of its proposal that the Commission wishes to explore are the following concerns:

- The possible adverse impact of cluttering the FM band and impairing development of the low power FM radio service.

- Limiting eligibility to AM stations that are educational or stand-alone or that have serious nighttime coverage deficiencies
- Limiting the number of translators authorized to fill in for any single AM station.
- Phasing in the proposed changes to provide an initial implementation period for daytime-only and Class C stations, then a further period for stations with severely deficient nighttime interference-free contours, and only later permitting other AM stations to apply.
- Permitting time brokerage or other financial support by primary stations.
- Permitting program origination during hours when the AM primary station is either not authorized to operate at all or authorized to operate at less than its licensed daytime power.
- Modifying the proposed rule to allow some minor portion of the translator's 60 dBu contour to extend outside the AM station's 2 mV/m daytime contour.
- Allowing use of measured conductivity to calculate the 2 mV/m daytime contour of the AM station, rather than requiring Figure M-3 figures in all cases.

The Commission will request comments to be filed within 60 days after publication of its *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* in the *Federal Register*, and replies 30 days beyond that. The *Notice* can be accessed from the Commission's Media Bureau website at [www.fcc.gov/mb](http://www.fcc.gov/mb). We also would be glad to send you a copy of the *Notice* and to explore the possibility of special temporary authority to rebroadcast an AM station on an existing FM translator.

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