

Communications Consumer Panel response to Ofcom consultation:

An approach to DAB coverage planning

Introduction

The Panel notes that Ofcom's consultation addresses the current level of FM coverage and the potential options to increase DAB coverage to match FM, rather than the question being considered by government of when there should be a switchover from FM to DAB services, which would have the bonus of freeing up spectrum for more community stations.

Recent figures suggest that DAB is not seen as compelling a proposition as digital television, with 72% of those who listen to radio stating that they either do not have a DAB radio set or never listen to it¹. The availability of innovative content may prove to be a significant driver, but this is dependent on industry enterprise. Given the current rate of take-up, the Panel has significant reservations about the possibility of switchover in 2015.

Question 1: Do you agree with our approach of matching DAB to FM within defined editorial areas? We will seek comments on specific editorial boundaries via separate consultations if and when specific changes are proposed.

Given the importance to consumers of the reception of radio services, the Panel welcomes the planned complete coverage of the UK by at least one editorial area. However it is important that people continue to have access to the stations that they currently receive - there should be no decrease in the consumer experience as a result of the switch from FM to DAB.

Whilst acknowledging that FM and DAB are of a different nature, the Panel is also pleased to note that the standard set for acceptable DAB coverage is higher than for existing FM coverage.

Question 4: Are the assumptions we make about needing to predict DAB in-vehicle coverage for 99% of the time and for 99% of locations the right ones?

As noted above, there should be no consumer detriment as a result of DAB switchover. The planned assumptions for coverage would appear to guard against this.

¹ [Ofcom Technology Tracker Wave 1 2011](#)

Question 5: Should the principle of merging editorial areas be explored, as a way of improving coverage?

The Panel considers it appropriate for the principle of merging editorial areas to be explored as a means to improve coverage. However any proposed changes should be clearly outlined in a consultation with relevant listeners and broadcasters, with robust evidence of the advantages and disadvantages.

Question 6: Above and beyond the frequency changes proposed in this document, should further changes to frequency allocations be explored, as a way of improving coverage?

The Panel considers it appropriate for changes to frequency allocations to be explored as a means to improve coverage. However any proposed changes should be clearly outlined in a consultation with relevant listeners and broadcasters, with robust evidence of the advantages and disadvantages.