



PARKES SHIRE COUNCIL

Progress, opportunities and a quality lifestyle for our residents

KB:LT423126

Contact Person: Kent Boyd

6 July 2007

The General Manager
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
GPO Box 2154
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Sir

DISCUSSION PAPER ON DIGITAL CONVERSION OF SELF-HELP TELEVISION RETRANSMISSION SITES - CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

I refer to the above call for submissions and accordingly provide the following comments in relation to the specific issues identified in the discussion paper.

1. DIGITAL TRANSMITTERS VERSUS MULTIPLEXERS

Parkes Council operates retransmission facilities in Peak Hill and Tullamore. These sites are remote from larger towns. Technicians can travel in excess of 200 kilometres to service these facilities (400 kilometres return). As a consequence it can take days to effect repair to these facilities. The cost of repair is also commensurately high. Peak Hill has a population of 1,200 and Tullamore 200. There is almost 30% of the communities on an Ages Pension and the current drought of record has exacerbated lower socio-economic status of these small rural communities.

Corollary Number 1

- Facilities remote from large urban centres require redundancy to avoid extended delay to the affected community.
- Facilities remote from large urban centres require robust components to reduce the need and associated cost of routine and breakdown maintenance.
- Individually digital transmitters are more likely to meet the above criteria than multiplexers.
- Cost of operating retransmitters has proven to be greater than originally predicted.
- Individual digital transmitters will allow redundancy at the channel level. That is, functional transmitters will allow the community to receive some channels while the failed transmitter is repaired. Ideally replacement transmitters should be available on-site to swap with failed units by a non-technician, to facilitate minimum channel downtime.
- Individual digital transmitters also allow a hybrid terrestrial/satellite system to be developed. This allows the higher quality satellite-delivered ABC and SBS services to be utilised with terrestrial based local channels, thus preserving local content.

2. INDIVIDUAL DTH OPTION VERSUS ANALOGUE-DIGITAL CONVERSION WHERE POPULATION IS BELOW 500

The communities of Tullamore and Peak Hill are directly covered by the WIN and PRIME local news service. During community meetings associated with the establishment of the television retransmission facilities in these communities, it was very apparent that local content, especially local news, was considered crucial to the support of the project.

Corollary Number 2

The Peak Hill or Tullamore communities are not likely to accept DTH if local content is lost.

- There is 120 residences in Tullamore. The cost to provide individual DTH is therefore between \$66,000 and \$144,000. Given that a site, kiosk, electricity and mast is available, and digital retro-fit could easily be accomplished, it would seem unlikely that the DTH system would be a viable economic consideration.

3. TIMING FOR DIGITAL CONVERSION

It would appear that cessation of the analogue transmissions is imminent.

Corollary Number 3

- In areas where technicians are not readily available, installation lead times can be significant.
- Many of the existing facilities have now been operating for a number of years. Failure of equipment is occurring with increased frequency. Repairs are now only being completed on an interim basis, to avoid large expenditure on equipment which will ultimately be redundant. Accordingly installation of necessary equipment should be installed as soon as possible.
- Digital transmissions currently carry additional channels. The wider community currently enjoy this higher level of service with simple set-top-box technology. The current analogue retransmitters are currently denied this service.

The establishment of self-help television retransmission sites has provided disadvantaged communities with television services similar to those enjoyed by the wider community. It is very important that these facilities be upgraded in a timely manner to ensure that this level of service does not deteriorate.

Should you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact Council's Director of Infrastructure, Mr Kent Boyd on 6861 2343.

Yours faithfully

Alan McCormack
GENERAL MANAGER

per:
Kent Boyd
DIRECTOR OF INFRASTRUCTURE

