

New FCC Rules Governing Low Power FM Radio

On November 27th, the Federal Communications Commission passed a set of provisions amending the rules that govern the low power FM radio (LPFM) service -- a noncommercial radio service that hundreds of schools, churches, municipalities, and community groups use to connect with their local communities. Below is the initial press statement of Pete Tridish, founder of the Prometheus Radio Project, on the FCC's decision.

"Today, Chairman Martin and Commissioners Adelstein and Copps should be congratulated for moving to protect and expand low power FM radio -- while also understanding that there are many issues we can resolve through further research and conversation. The Federal Communications Commission has taken a number of important steps today towards a better future for low power radio stations and their communities. We appreciate the partial support of Commissioners Mcdowell and Tate, and feel confident that the concerns they raised can be addressed to their satisfaction.

The FCC moved to prioritize local needs in their decisions on a number of administrative issues that are vital to low power FM (LPFM) radio station operators -- including preventing a group from owning more than one LPFM, clarifying the rules surrounding the transfer of licenses, and helping groups make important changes to their boards of directors.

On the bigger issue of how to protect low power stations under threat of losing their frequencies and broadcast coverage when full power stations encroach upon them, the FCC has made progress by outlining plans that can immediately save some stations from getting knocked off the air. The FCC has promised to further consider ways to resolve trickier conflicts between LPFM stations and full power broadcasters in communities nationwide. We remain concerned that some LPFMs will not be protected by the item passed today, and urge the Commission to help all stations threatened with losing their licenses or their signal coverage.

When it comes to low power FM radio, the most important issue facing the Commission today was the question of how to set the priority between 'translator' stations -- which repeat the signals of full power stations and extend the full power station's coverage -- and new LPFM applicants. We commend the decision to limit translator applications from 2003 to 10 applications per entity. The Commission has wisely chosen to take more comment from the public, and to continue to study the issue more closely. We believe that a creative solution can be found that will allow the reasonable use of translators, while preserving significant opportunity for community radio stations to be born. Low Power FM radio supporters and advocates have researched and found many ways to balance

these priorities, and we at Prometheus look forward to the opportunity to share more ideas on this issue with the Commission.

We also commend the Commission for moving towards use of better engineering methods for finding channels for low power radio stations. We believe that in further comment, the Commission will find this to be an important opportunity for low power stations.

Low power FM radio is one tool communities can use to connect to each other. Prometheus looks forward to working alongside millions of Americans not just on community radio, but on the vital debates around who owns our television, broadcast, cable, and many other forms of media nationwide.

Our hearty congratulations to the Commissioners and the staff for a significant step for low power FM, and we look forward to bringing many of these important LPFM issues to resolution over the coming months."

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