

Before the
FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
Washington, DC 20554

In the Matter of)	
)	
Petition for Rule Making to Reallocate)	MB Docket No. _____
Spectrum in the 45 to 50 MHz Band)	RM- _____
for AM Broadcast Stations)	
)	
Revitalization of the AM Radio Service)	MB Docket No. 13-249

To: Office of the Secretary
Attn: Chief, Media Bureau

PETITION FOR RULE MAKING

WRNJ Radio, Inc., licensee of Station WRNJ(AM), Hackettstown, New Jersey and three FM translators ("WRNJ"), hereby respectfully submits this Petition for Rule Making proposing to reallocate the 45-50 MHz spectrum for use by AM radio stations on a voluntary basis. AM licensees could relocate using the DRM+ system.¹ The plight of AM radio has been well documented in numerous filings and recognized by the Commission in the *AM Revitalization* proceeding.²

1. WRNJ has experienced all of the problems that plague the AM band and, as a result, most of its listeners have come to rely on the FM translators for WRNJ's local programming. The opportunity for AM broadcasters to use FM translators has enabled stations like WRNJ to retain their listenership but at the same time caused these listeners to abandon the AM band. Many AM stations have filed petitions and comments during the

¹ DRM Mode E (DRM+) is a digital radio standard from the Digital Radio Mondiale Consortium for use above 30 MHz and is designed specifically as a digital replacement for analog AM and FM radio.

² *Revitalization of the AM Radio Service, First Report and Order, Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making and Notice of Inquiry*, 30 FCC Rcd 12145 (2015); *Second Further Notice of Proposed Rule Making* FCC 18-139, rel. October 5, 2108 ("AM Revitalization").

last decade urging the Commission to consider migrating AM stations to the VHF band and, in particular Channels 5 and 6 (76-88 MHz) but to no avail.³ The concept is still popular among AM broadcasters as witnessed by the numerous supporting comments filed in the AM Revitalization proceeding. While WRNJ is supportive of using the large vacant space in Channels 5 and 6 for AM stations to migrate, WRNJ has also determined that there is a large portion of vacant space in the 45-50 MHz band.

2. WRNJ suggests that the Commission consider the digital transmission system DRM+ with a vertical only, non-gain antenna. The 45-50 MHz portion of the VHF band would be ideal for local/regional coverage, the type of local service reminiscent of the early days of AM radio. Many other countries have already transitioned or are in the process of transitioning their AM stations to FM spectrum.⁴ In doing so, they are primarily using the DRM+ standard. DRM+ is far more efficient than any current mode of spectrum usage. For example, 1 kW ERP is equivalent in coverage to the current 5 kW coverage. Such efficiencies will lower the electric bill, reduce tower loading (with the proposed vertical antenna configuration) and rent. In addition, the International Table of Frequency Allocations already list 47-50 MHz as approved for broadcasting in Regions 1 and 3. WRNJ recognizes that receivers are not yet available but, just like any new spectrum usage, receiver manufacturers will respond to the demand for new receivers and AM stations can migrate to the new frequencies over time by continuing to operate with their current facilities during a transition period.⁵ Of course, this would be a voluntary migration

³ See, e.g., Comments of the Broadcast Maximization Committee filed in MB Docket No. 07-295, et al, filed on July 30, 2008.

⁴ Japan and Italy are the latest examples of moving their AM stations to operate as FM stations utilizing DRM+.

⁵ In this regard, there appears to be little or no demand for alternative usage for the 530-1710 kHz (AM) spectrum.

and those AM stations wishing to remain could benefit from the available space created by other AMs that have vacated this spectrum.

3. Current occupants of the 45-50 MHz are listed as state and local government offices such as emergency management, transportation departments, fire departments, police dispatch and tactical units and EMS paging. Monitoring of this frequency band at multiple locations in New Jersey and New York has found the band virtually abandoned. WRNJ utilized a spectrum monitor over an extended period of time with the ability to pick up signals over a large area including New Jersey, New York, Connecticut and Pennsylvania without hearing any signals. Discussion with equipment distributors for major manufacturers such as Motorola reveal that equipment is no longer manufactured for this band and that most of the users have migrated to higher frequencies where hand held communications equipment can operate more efficiently with smaller antennas. One of the manufacturers contacted for this filing indicated that it removes but no longer installs low band base station antennas. WRNJ recognizes there are still a few users, but it is believed that it is just a matter of time before they also migrate.

4. Of all of the AM revitalization proposals adopted by the Commission thus far, the use of FM translators has been overwhelmingly popular. In Chairman Pai's address to the NAB show on April 6, 2019, he stated that the FCC has granted 1,707 new FM translator permits to AM stations representing about 37% of all AM stations. This percentage does not include the large number of AM stations which already had FM translators prior to the recent window filing processes. There should be no doubt that AM station owners want to operate as FM stations. But the use of FM translators is just a short term solution to a longer range problem that won't be resolved in the future.

Translators are secondary and have no guarantee of continued service. Licensing AM stations in the 45-50 MHz band would provide protection.

5. For decades the AM service has deteriorated and lost listeners to other sources of programming. The proliferation of man-made RF noise sources is just the latest problem to affect the quality of this service. AM stations have contended with inferior fidelity and the need to detune every time there is new construction nearby. The LED traffic lights cause noise interference to car radio reception of the AM dial. The list seems to increase every year. AM station owners are also suffering economically as they try to repair, maintain or improve their facilities. The costs of such undertakings often exceed the value of their stations as costs increase, financing becomes scarce and sale prices decline.

6. Innovative ideas are needed. AM stations still have much to offer. Most news/talk, foreign language and other local and diverse program formats are found in the AM service. The great majority of minority owned stations are AM facilities. WRNJ believes it has a viable plan for the wholesale conversion of those AM stations that wish to convert into the 45 to 50 MHz band. Under this plan, AM stations could transition to this space and immediately operate in the digital mode when they are ready to do so.⁶ In this manner, AM stations can solve the current digital problems they are experiencing, especially at night. They can benefit from additional channel streams like other FM stations and they can avoid the interference problems that will characterize the dual

⁶ WRNJ is aware of the pending Petition for Rule Making filed by Bryan Broadcasting Corporation proposing to allow AM stations to operate in the MA3 all digital mode of HD radio (RM-11836). WRNJ believes this proposal is consistent with the proposed operation of AM stations in the 45-50 MHz band.

analog/digital operations in the FM band during the indeterminate period of transition to full digital operation.

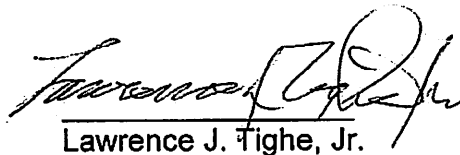
7. WRNJ is aware that technical standards will need to be developed. The policies, standards and priorities for the conversion and migration of AM stations will also need to be developed including authorizing equivalent coverage areas. When it comes time to convert the AM station to an FM digital operation, money will indeed be needed. One source of funds might stem from the elimination of multi-tower arrays. The land on which the additional towers currently stand could be sold producing needed funds for the conversion. The public at large can also benefit from the environmental effects of the eventual elimination of perhaps hundreds of towers nationwide and the potential radiation hazards that these towers present. Although WRNJ is not devoting much discussion on the environmental benefits of this proposal, this type of benefit should not be underestimated.

8. Furthermore, by migrating to the VHF spectrum, AM stations would no longer need the FM translators which, in turn, would eliminate much of the congestion in the FM band and many of the interference complaints that remain. In addition, listeners would enjoy the superior quality of digital service from these stations. For AM stations that decide not to migrate, those stations could expand either in an analog or digital mode.

Accordingly, WRNJ offers this proposal for further discussion and urges the Commission to start the process by issuing a Public Notice asking for comments on the migration of AM stations to the 45-50 MHz band on a voluntary basis.

Respectfully submitted,

WRNJ RADIO, INC.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lawrence J. Tighe, Jr.", written over a horizontal line.

Lawrence J. Tighe, Jr.
Vice President
Box 1000
Hackettstown, NJ 07840

May 15, 2019