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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

The Honorable William E. Kennard
Chairman
Federal Communications Commission
1919 M Street, NW
Room 814
Washington, DC 20554

Re: In the Matter of Implementation of Section 304 of the
Telecommunications Act of 1996;
Commercial Availability of Navigation Devices
CS Docket No. 97-80

Dear Chairman Kennard:

The above-captioned docket presents a framework and opportunity for the Commission to consider and address some of the cable interoperability issues that are important to the success of the digital television transition. In particular, the navigation device proceeding provides a framework through which the Commission should guide and encourage the adoption of common technical standards approved by an accredited standard-setting body for cable system and other multichannel video program distributors (MVPDs). This proceeding, however, did not tee up a number of technical and policy issues implicated in the relationship between digital broadcast and cable systems. These issues should be addressed promptly in a separate cable carriage/interoperability proceeding that will encompass all of the critical cable/over-the-air DTV/consumer interoperability issues that must be resolved to facilitate a rapid and efficient transition to DTV.

In the above-captioned proceeding, the Commission should take steps to ensure:

- interoperability between cable system equipment and other electronic devices and *nationwide* portability of digital consumer premises equipment;

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- the consumer's right to attach and use any non-interfering device to access MVPDs' services;
- the separation of conditional access features from other functions in digital devices so that manufacturers can use a modular of key approach to encryption and thereby make possible cable ready DTV sets; and
- the adoption of a standard interface (such as the IEEE 1394 interface) between the navigation device, the digital television receiver, and the digital VCR (and other devices).

The Need for Common or Interoperable Standards

The Commission can facilitate the DTV transition by directing industry adoption of common industry standards, approved by an open, accredited standard-setting body, for cable systems and other MVPDs to operate with DTV receivers and other DTV-related devices (e.g., VCRs, TV monitors, etc.). Without the expeditious adoption of common or interoperable standards, early DTV set purchasers -- who will be critical in generating enthusiasm for DTV to drive the transition -- will find that they cannot navigate easily through different program options or that their new DTV sets do not work with their cable systems. Furthermore, with the recent announcement of some consumer manufacturers that they will develop and market DTV broadcast set-top boxes separate from the display devices, the need for common or interoperable standards is particularly important to ensure interoperability between these set top boxes and the display devices. Without this interoperability, consumer confusion and stranded investments could ensue. The DTV transition could thereby be undermined.

Common or interoperable standards are critical to the achievement of the portability and interoperability goals of the navigation device proceeding. Common standards will assure consumers that they can purchase a DTV set or a set-top box that can receive undegraded digital broadcast television and cable signals and can directly attach the navigational device or set to the cable system or MVPD. These standards are important because they permit consumer manufacturers to know what transmission formats need to be demodulated, what video and audio formats need to be decoded, how to connect with the security code of such transmissions, and how to have DTV receivers or TV monitors connect and communicate with the set-top boxes or other navigation devices that might be mediating such transmissions.

Specifically, common or interoperable standards are needed to ensure the interoperability of navigation and other digital devices with digital television sets, TV

monitors, cable systems, broadcast signals and MVPDs in at least the following areas:

Modulation. Digital video transmission standards such as SCTE DVS031 and ATSC A/53 to ensure that the digital devices know what they are receiving.

Video and Audio Compression. Digital video and audio compression standards such as SCTE DVS033 and ATSC A/53 and associated audio formats, to ensure that the digital device can decode all digital and broadcast formats.

Security. Encryption interface standards to allow digital devices to interconnect with cable operators' (and perhaps others MVPDs) encryption.

Interface Standards. Common interface standards to ensure interconnectivity of various navigation devices with DTV receivers, TV monitors, VCRs and other digital devices. Examples of such standards are the IEEE 1394 interface for baseband DTV transport streams and a high resolution video baseband interface for display devices. It is also important for the FCC to foster a standardized program system information structure, *e.g.*, PSIP (ATSC A/65 and SCTE DVS 097), for use in originating program guides, that is consistent across cable and broadcast systems to facilitate user-friendly devices for channel navigation.

The Commission's Role

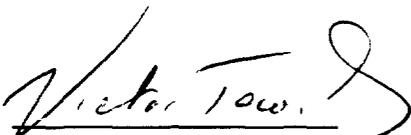
The Commission must play a central role in encouraging the speedy adoption of the necessary common or interoperable standards. It is not enough for the Commission to sanction private standard-setting efforts. Those efforts do not always move as quickly as the public interest demands. Moreover, some of the same standard-setting efforts are being carried out by more than one standard-setting body. If MVPDs in the same sector adopt different, albeit approved, standards, the goals of interoperability, portability, and retail availability for navigation devices will be substantially undermined. If common standards are to be achieved before incompatible and proprietary digital equipment -- and the accompanying consumer confusion and frustration -- becomes prevalent, the Commission must step in to jump-start and focus the standard-setting processes.

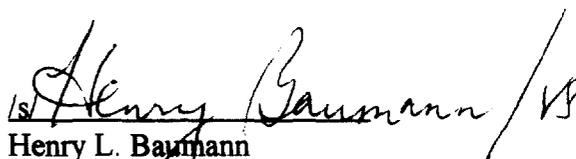
The Commission should set a deadline of six months after adoption of the report and order in this proceeding for cable systems, and perhaps other MVPDs, to adopt common or interoperable standards in the areas outlined above, particularly the baseband DTV transport stream interface (*e.g.*, the IEEE 1394 standard). The Commission should make clear that if that deadline is not met, the Commission will revisit the issue.

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Thank you for your consideration of these matters.

Sincerely yours,


Victor Tawil
Senior Vice President
Association for Maximum
Service Television, Inc.
1776 Massachusetts Avenue, NW
Suite 310
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 861-0344
Fax: (202) 861-0342


Henry L. Baumann
Executive Vice President and
General Counsel

Valerie Schulte
Senior Associate General Counsel

Lynn Claudy
Senior Vice President
Science & Technology
National Association of Broadcasters
1771 N Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036-2891
Phone: (202) 429-5458
Fax: (202) 429-3526