

TRAI releases Recommendations on “Formulating a Digital Radio Broadcast Policy for private Radio broadcasters”

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The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has today released its Recommendations on “Formulating a Digital Radio Broadcast Policy for private Radio broadcasters” along with terms and conditions and reserve price for commencement of digital radio broadcasting service in four ‘A+’ category cities viz., Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Chennai; and nine ‘A’ category cities viz., Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Ahmedabad, Surat, Pune, Jaipur, Lucknow, Kanpur and Nagpur.

Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) vide its reference dated 23rd April 2024 had sought recommendations of TRAI under section 11 (1)(a)(i) of the TRAI Act, 1997 on formulating a digital radio broadcast policy for private Radio broadcasters.

In this regard, a consultation paper was issued on 30th September 2024 seeking stakeholders’ comments on various issues relating to formulation of digital radio broadcast policy for private radio broadcasters. 43 comments and 13 counter-comments were received on the consultation paper, which are available on TRAI’s website. Subsequently, an Open House Discussion was held on 8th January 2025.

After considering all comments/counter-comments received and further analysis of the issues, the Authority has finalized its recommendations. The salient features of the recommendations are as below:

- a. The digital radio services should be commenced in Simulcast mode by new broadcasters. The existing analog FM Radio broadcasters should also be permitted to migrate to simulcast mode on voluntary basis.
- b. The proposed simulcast mode will enable them to broadcast one analog, three digital and one data channel on the assigned spot frequency.
- c. A single digital radio technology standard should be adopted in India for introduction of digital radio broadcasting in VHF Band II.
- d. The Government should select a suitable Digital Radio Technology for deployment in India either by holding consultations with main stakeholders, that is, the radio broadcasters and the radio receiver manufacturers; or by incorporating selection of technology in the spectrum auction process; or any other method considered suitable by the government.
- e. The government should prepare the frequency planning in single technology scenario for each of the four cities of category ‘A+’ and nine cities of category ‘A’ and place in public domain.

- f. The frequency for new channels should be assigned by way of auction in accordance with Section 4(4) of the Telecommunication Act, 2023.
- g. Immediately after the successful assignment of frequency through auction for digital radio broadcasting, an offer should be made to the existing FM Radio broadcasters to migrate to simulcast mode on voluntary basis.
- h. A time limit of 6 months from the date of conclusion of auction process should be given to the existing broadcasters to exercise the option to migrate to simulcast mode.
- i. For migration to simulcast mode, existing FM radio broadcasters will be required to pay an amount equal to the difference of auction determined price for digital radio broadcasting in a city and the proportionate amount of Non-refundable One Time Entry Fee (NOTEF) for the remaining period of the existing permission.
- j. Radio broadcasters should commence simulcast operations within two years of conclusion of auction process or acceptance of option for migration.
- k. The sunset date for the analog broadcasting should be decided after evaluating the progress of digital radio broadcasting at a later date.
- l. Government should introduce a new authorisation for 'Radio Broadcasting Infrastructure Provider' for provision of active and passive digital infrastructure which can be leased to radio broadcasters. However, this will not be a pre-requisite for introduction of digital radio services.
- m. The Government should issue an advisory regarding availability of digital radio receivers in mobile phones and car infotainment systems, similar to the advisory issued by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) for availability of FM Radio receivers in mobile phones.
- n. The private terrestrial radio broadcasters should be allowed to stream their live terrestrial channels concurrently, without user control.
- To oversee and monitor the development and proliferation of digital radio receivers and market dynamics, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) should constitute a high-level steering committee comprising of senior representatives from the MIB, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), radio broadcasters, device manufacturers, and the technology provider.
- p. Eligibility conditions (including the minimum net worth criteria) for digital radio broadcasting service authorisation should be same as as provided in TRAI's recommendations on 'Framework for Service Authorisations for provision of Broadcasting Services under the Telecommunications Act, 2023' issued on 21st February 2025.
- q. Period of authorisation for digital radio broadcasting should be 15 years.
- r. Definition of Gross Revenue as mentioned in the Policy Guidelines for Phase-III of private FM radio, notified by MIB on 25.07.2011 has been retained.

- s. Revenue from streaming of a radio channel should be included in the definition of GR, if streaming is being provided by the radio broadcaster.
- t. The Authorisation fee should be levied on Adjusted GR on similar lines as in Telecommunication authorisations.
- u. Applicable Gross Revenue (ApGR) should be equal to the total Gross Revenue (GR) of the licensee as reduced by the revenue items not directly related to radio broadcasting services.
- v. Adjusted Gross Revenue (AGR) shall be arrived at after deducting any GST paid
- w. Annual/Authorisation Fee shall be:
 - i. 4% of AGR for cities of category 'A+', 'A', 'B', 'C', and 'D'.
 - ii. For cities of 'Others' category (in border and hilly areas of NE, J&K, Ladakh & Island Territory) and 'E' Category – 2% of AGR for initial period of 3 years, thereafter same as above.
- x. An Authorised entity should not be allowed to own more than 40% of the total spot frequencies in a city subject to a minimum of three different operators in the city.
- y. Two new spot frequencies for digital radio broadcasting in each city out of total spot frequencies identified by MIB in category A+ and A cities should be auctioned at this stage. Auction of remaining frequencies in these cities to be considered after reviewing outcome of this round and the progress of development and proliferation of receiver device ecosystem. The definition of spot frequency for digital radio has been provided.
- z. Choice of genres on multiple radio channels of an entity in a city should be left to the market forces.
- a. The Central Government should notify separate Programme Code and Advertisement Code for Terrestrial Radio Services.
- b. In case of non-operationalisation of services within a period of 24 months, frequency assignment should be withdrawn, and the entity should be debarred from allotment of another spot frequency in the same city for a period of five years from the date of such withdrawal.
- c. Prasar Bharati should share its land and tower infrastructure (LTI) as well as common transmission infrastructure (CTI) with private broadcasters at concessional rental rates while taking full recovery of operational expenses.
- d. The condition for mandatory co-location of transmission infrastructure should be removed, and the authorised entities of Terrestrial Radio Service should be allowed to share infrastructure, on voluntary basis with the entities of broadcasting services, telecom services, infrastructure providers etc. as per technical and commercial feasibility.
- e. Reserve prices for auction of spectrum required for simulcast by new radio broadcasters in 13 cities of category 'A+' and 'A' should be as follows:

City	Category	RP for Spectrum for Simulcast (Rs. in crore)
Chennai	A+	146.68
Delhi	A+	177.63
Kolkata	A+	79.96
Mumbai	A+	194.08
Ahmedabad	A	40.44
Bengaluru	A	87.22
Hyderabad	A	65.85
Jaipur	A	26.89
Kanpur	A	20.52
Lucknow	A	24.59
Nagpur	A	29.48
Pune	A	41.26
Surat	A	25.89

- f. Successful bidders of new spot frequencies should be given multiple options for payment of bid amount similar to the spectrum auction done by the Government for telecommunications sector.
- g. Existing operators who migrate to simulcast should also be given multiple options for payment of migration amount.
- h. In case of payment of bid amount in annual instalments, incremental instalments should be permitted in three slabs of 5 years, whereby recovering 66.67% of the ADP in equal instalments over 15 years duly protecting NPV and balance 33.33% at these rates:
1. Nil in first five years; 1/3rd in next five years, equally distributed over the five years period; 2/3rd in the final five years equally distributed over the five years period; duly protecting the NPV.
 - ii. In case of payment of migration amount in annual instalments, incremental instalments should be permitted in three slabs of 5 years, whereby recovering 66.67% of the ADP reduced by proportionate amount of NOTEF for remaining period of existing permission, in equal instalments over 15 years duly protecting NPV and balance 33.33% of ADP at these rates:
 1. Nil in first five years; 1/3rd in next five years, equally distributed over the five years period; 2/3rd in the final five years equally distributed over the five years period; duly protecting the NPV.
- j. In case of annual instalment option or part payment option, the NPV of ADP/migration amount should be protected by discounting the instalments at an applicable interest rate of one year MCLR of State Bank of India.

Digital Radio broadcasting will provide a number of advantages over analogue radio broadcasting. The major advantage of Digital Radio broadcasting as proposed by TRAI in these recommendations is the capability of broadcasting three digital and one data channel, in addition to one analog channel on a single spot frequency in simulcast mode, in which the digital radio channel provide a superior quality of audio, whereas in the analogue mode broadcasting of only one channel is possible on the carrier frequency. In a competitive environment, digital radio broadcasting can provide new opportunities to radio broadcasters as well as multiple listening options and value-added services to the listeners.

The full text of the Recommendations is available on TRAI's website www.trai.gov.in. For any clarification/information, Dr. Deepali Sharma, Advisor (Broadcasting & Cable Services), TRAI may be contacted at Tele. No.: +91-11- 20907774.

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