

Request for Extension Of Special Temporary Authority

As previously explained to the Commission, in September 2017, WIPR-FM ceased broadcasting altogether due to the devastating impact of Hurricane Maria. Since that time, WIPR-FM has been operating under STA from various locations, most recently from a site known as “La Mesa,” and the purpose of this request is to obtain Commission consent to continue operating WIPR-FM from La Mesa for an additional six-month period.

WIPR-FM’s licensed site is known as “La Santa Peak,” which is owned by the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (“DRNA”). For many years, DRNA (or its predecessors) had leased the site to a party unaffiliated with PRPBC: the owner of WAPA-TV (Televiscentro of Puerto Rico, LLC, or its predecessors (collectively, “WAPA”). WAPA had erected and maintained a tower on that site for many years. Pursuant to a separate lease with WAPA, PRPBC was permitted to co-locate antennas and transmitters on the tower for the Station and one of PRPBC’s television stations (WIPR-TV, San Juan), along with WAPA’s own television station.

Following Hurricane Maria, the Station’s licensee, Puerto Rico Public Broadcasting Corporation (“PRPBC”) understands that WAPA was able to relocate its television station to a different location, but such location was not made available to PRPBC. Sometime in mid-2018, WAPA informed PRPBC that it was abandoning its rights to utilize La Santa Peak, and intended to terminate its lease with DRNA. Shortly after learning of WAPA’s decision, PRPBC informed DRNA that its desire was to restore the Station’s operations from La Santa Peak. Since at least the end of 2018, PRPBC has been in the process of rebuilding the La Santa Peak site so it can resume operating the Station from that location, but construction has been delayed due to circumstances beyond the control of PRPBC.

After many months of delays, which were caused by circumstances beyond the control of PRPBC, PRPBC was able to enter into a lease with DRNA to rebuild the tower at the La Santa Peak site and utilize it for the Station’s broadcast operations. PRPBC has contracted with an outside firm – Sabre Industries – to undertake construction of the tower that will be utilized by the Station (“Tower”), and the FAA has approved such construction. PRPBC also has taken delivery of the Station’s antenna from Dielectric.

At its facilities in Iowa, Sabre Industries is in the process of completing work on building the Tower. Sabre Industries recently received the results of soil and related testing at La Santa Peak, which confirmed that Sabre Industries’ basic design for the Tower foundation can be implemented as proposed; however, additional modifications may be necessary. PRPBC is waiting on additional information from Sabre Industries.

The next step in the process is for the Permits Management Office for Puerto Rico (“PMO”) to issue a permit to allow for the final construction of the Tower at the La Santa Peak property (“Permit”). PRPBC expects that the PMO will issue the Permit by sometime in April 2023. Once the Permit has been issued, and Sabre Industries has completed work on the Tower,

it will probably take about 4-6 weeks for the Tower to be delivered by ground to a southern U.S. port, then shipped to the port of San Juan, and then delivered by ground to La Santa Peak.

While PRPBC has been waiting on Sabre Industries to finish its work, PRPBC has begun preparing the site for delivery and installation of the equipment. PRPBC's work to date has included, among other things, demolition of the base of the tower that had collapsed following Hurricane Maria, and the modification of the anchors that will be associated with the rebuilt tower. Ultimately, a new base will be created, and a new tower and guy wires erected.

Unfortunately, Hurricane Fiona (which made landfall in September 2022) brought more than thirty inches of rain throughout Puerto Rico. Many roads were damaged, especially in the mountainous area where La Santa Peak is located. In particular, the main entrance road of the La Santa Peak site suffered a landslide. This damage means that no trucks can pass through, and no way to bring the Tower to the site, even if the Tower was fully built and able to be delivered to San Juan.

La Santa Peak is part of the Carite State Forest and, as such, is owned and managed by DRNA. Although PRPBC and DRNA are sister state agencies, PRPBC has no control over DRNA's activities. PRPBC has been working closely with DRNA to obtain the funding necessary to rebuild the damaged roadway. PRPBC tried to obtain emergency funds, but those efforts were denied. DRNA also spent 45 days on the same project. In the end, however, PRPBC, in conjunction with DRNA now is in the process of seeking assistance from FEMA.

FEMA visited the site in late December 2022, and advised PRPBC (and DRNA) that it would take approximately 2-3 months to provide a design for the reconstruction of the damaged roadway, and then an additional 3 months to complete the "Request for Proposal" ("RFP") process. Unfortunately, the design process has not yet been completed. Once the design and RFP processes have been completed, and DEMA allocates the funding, PRPBC anticipates that the road will be rebuilt within 90 days thereafter. At that time, PRPBC will be able to schedule a time for the company that will install the Tower (TCI – which previously has done work on the Island) to complete its work.

Unfortunately, there is no easy way to allow for delivery of the Tower to La Santa Peak until the road is reconstructed. The timing for such reconstruction is beyond PRPBC's control, because the La Santa Peak transmit site location is owned by DRNA, not PRPBC, and because the parties are waiting on FEMA to complete the design and RFP processes before construction can commence.

If the road is rebuilt by September 2023, and if Sabre Industries is able to deliver the Tower to the Port of San Juan and then transported to La Santa Peak by sometime in September or October 2023, PRPBC is hopeful that the entire project will be completed by the first quarter of 2024, depending on TCI's schedule. At that time, the Station will be able to resume operating from its licensed site, although it may be necessary to file an application for modification of license.

Based on the foregoing, pursuant to the flexibility afforded by the FCC to Puerto Rico licensees pursuant to the Public Notice, DA 18-901, dated August 30, 2018, PRPBC requests an extension of the STA to operate the Station from the La Mesa site for an additional six months. Grant of this request would be in the public interest because it will allow PRPBC to continue delivering the programming of the Station to viewers in San Juan and the surrounding areas without interruption.