

AM Revitalization Public Interest Reasons in Favor of WTCJ(AM) Waiver Grant

WTCJ(AM), Tell City, Indiana, in addition to being an AM station which in itself presents technical and reception challenges, is authorized with one of the least powerful and most interfered with of AM radio station classes. WTCJ(AM) is on 1230 kHz with a power of 850 watts day and night, on a Class C local channel with nighttime service greatly restricted by interference. WTCJ(AM) commenced broadcasting on February 1, 1948 and has served its community of Tell City, Indiana continuously since that date.

The plight of AM radio in the past several years is well-recognized with Commissioner Ajit Pai recently at the 2012 National Association of Broadcasters Radio Show calling for AM revitalization efforts. Commissioner Pai asked if there were regulatory barriers that the FCC can remove to help the AM radio sector rebound.¹

The radio trade press abounds with stories of AM radio's plight.² A variety of solutions have been offered including a new band for AM stations on television Channels 5 and 6, all-digital broadcasting for AM radio, substantial across-the-board power increases for all AM stations, and the elimination of protections to clear channel AM stations. None of these proposals, however, offer the prospect of immediate practical help to AM stations. Rather, a new radio band or all-digital AM broadcasting, even if feasible, each requires new radio receivers and would take years if not a decade or more to implement. A substantial power increase would require capital expenditures by most AM stations of tens of thousands of dollars and power bills increasing by ten-fold or more, neither of which is practical for most AM broadcasters.

Rather, there is the removal of one regulatory barrier -- one regulatory change -- that the FCC could immediately take and would bring immediate relief to a number of AM stations. That action is to make it easier for an AM station to move an FM translator station to a transmitter site and a channel from which it can serve the AM station's listening audience as an in-contour FM translator. This change is staring the FCC in the face as a change it can make today -- with results occurring today -- to revitalize AM stations.

¹ See e.g. Remarks of Commissioner Ajit Pai Before the [National Association of Broadcasters] Radio Show, Dallas, Texas, September 19, 2012 at page 5. <http://www.fcc.gov/document/commissioner-pai-remarks-radio-show>

² See *Ben Downs: AM Needs Technological Help*, by Leslie Stimson, Radio World Magazine, September 13, 2012 at: <http://www.radioworld.com/article/ben-downs-am-needs-technological-help-/215444> and *How to Help AM Radio in Six Steps*, by David Webster, Radio World Magazine, August 6, 2012 at: <http://www.radioworld.com/article/how-to-help-am-radio-in-six-steps/214779>. Distressingly, one high-end auto manufacturer has announced that its newest hybrid model, the Porsche 918 Spyder, simply will not have an AM radio receiver, but will have an FM receiver, due to the highly-diminished AM reception which is the result of its carbon fiber, magnesium and aluminum body: <http://www.insideradio.com/Article.asp?id=2574513&spid=32060>.

A grant of this requested waiver for WTCJ(AM), if considered for other AM stations, will not help all AM stations. Indeed, few FCC rule changes can be expected to benefit all radio stations. The adoption of the AM expanded band rules years ago benefitted less than 100 AM radio stations. Changes to the FM technical rules such as allowing for one-step class upgrades, community of license moves by application, and FM Class A power increases, benefitted only a fraction of existing FM stations.

A quest by the FCC to benefit all AM stations, while commendable, is a chimera that will not be attainable nor practical in the near term. Just because all AM stations cannot benefit from the waiver requested for WTCJ(AM), however, is not a reason to disregard this requested waiver that, if applied to AM stations in like-circumstances to WTCJ(AM), will revitalize AM service to those communities.

WTCJ(AM) is requesting this FM translator transmitter site and channel modification as a waiver rather than as a rule change because the narrowness of this request will benefit but a limited number of AM stations. It does not behoove the FCC to use rule making resources in tweaks to its existing rules if doing so would only benefit a limited class of broadcasters. In the case of this waiver, the class of AM broadcasters who would benefit are those like WTCJ(AM) for whom an FM translator is available for acquisition within its interference contour, and under current FCC rules the FM translator could operate at or near the AM station's transmitter site as an in-contour FM translator but for the regulatory barriers of Section 74.1233(a)(1) of the Commission's rules.

The W218CR FM translator, once modified, will bring consistent daytime and nighttime service to much of the WTCJ(AM) service area and listening audience. Currently, WTCJ(AM)'s nighttime service is severely restricted by the inherent nighttime interference on its Class C local channel. While it may have been possible at one point in the history of radio broadcasting to achieve excellence in service to a community with either a daytime-only signal, or different daytime and nighttime coverage areas, radio audiences now expect a consistency of service from a radio station. Such consistency is not achievable with an WTCJ(AM) operating on the Class C local channel of 1230 kHz.

WTCJ(AM) will be revitalized with carriage on the W218CR FM translator. The consistency and robustness of the translator signal will be much more accepted by the listening public than the signal of WTCJ(AM).

We have as radio broadcasters personally experienced this phenomenon with five other AM stations who have supplemented their in-contour AM coverage with FM translators. The provision of an FM translator to re-broadcast WTCJ(AM) will increase listenership and enable WTCJ(AM) to provide more local services such as local sports, local debates, and local involvement. While all of this can be done with the current WTCJ(AM) signal, the missing ingredient is the financial support for such services from local advertisers. Local advertisers perceive that the public no longer listens to an AM station's questionable signal. In small towns, there are no local Arbitron ratings to prove or disprove this .

Our experience with in-contour FM translators carrying our other AM stations as a primary station is that business has improved for the AM station to the point that the AM station

alone can now support a myriad of local service activities with advertiser support. This is truly "AM revitalization"!

While 20 to 30 years ago WTCJ(AM) was vibrant, WTCJ(AM)'s billing today is an abysmal less-than \$2,000 month in revenue. Such revenue hardly pays the electric bill and does not begin to cover the cost of its employees. In brief, the revenues generated by WTCJ(AM) today does not sustain its basic operations.

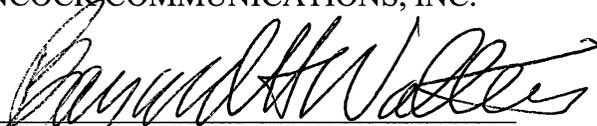
With an in-contour FM translator, WTCJ(AM) will be revitalized. The immediate AM revitalization of WTCJ(FM) with the requested in-contour FM translator will enable a continuation of service to its community of license. Losing a local service from a now-failing AM station is not in the best interests to the community of Tell City, Indiana, nor is it in the public interest.

An immediate substantive step in our changing media world that the FCC can take to revitalize WTCJ(AM) and other AM stations with similar opportunities to rebroadcast on FM translators is to grant the requested waiver of Section 74.1233(a)(1) of the Commission's rules.

Respectfully submitted,

HANCOCK COMMUNICATIONS, INC.

By



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