

UK Government report says all UK national and local radio stations to be DAB-only from 2015

Digital Britain gives green light to DAB in cars by 2013

Ministers call for a common European approach to digital radio.

London and Geneva, 16th June 2009

The UK Government published its final Digital Britain report today (June 16th) with a number of actions to secure DAB digital radio as the primary radio broadcast platform in the UK. It proposes all national and the majority of local radio stations will be transmitted on DAB-only within 6 years, signalling the end of national FM services in the UK. A five point plan for DAB to be in all new cars by 2013 is proposed and the report calls on the European Commission to lead a common Europe-wide approach to digital radio.

The UK government proposes that radio will undergo a Digital Upgrade so that all UK national broadcast radio stations are DAB-only from the end of 2015. It recognises that existing national FM infrastructure will be at the end of its useful life and any further investment in analogue transmission would be wasted. The report requires the national BBC and commercial radio multiplexes to increase coverage to match that offered by FM now. Community radio will continue to use FM spectrum whilst local and regional DAB is to be re-planned to provide more efficient digital coverage.

Quentin Howard, President of WorldDMB, said: "We welcome this positive report and the action points to secure the take-up of digital radio. In particular, the transfer of all national stations to DAB, and cessation of FM transmission gives an unequivocal timescale for the automotive industry and receiver manufacturers. The call for a common approach to digital radio across Europe is welcomed and WorldDMB stands ready to work with the European Commission and national governments to achieve this."

The Digital Britain report also sets out a five point plan to encourage the take-up of digital radios in cars:

1. Work with manufacturers so that vehicles sold with radio are digitally enabled by the end of 2013;
2. Support a common logo for digital radios and ensure that non-DAB radios, and their limitations, are clearly labelled;
3. Encourage the development of portable digital converters, such as the Pure Highway, and the integration of DAB into other vehicle devices such as sat-navs;
4. Promote the introduction of more sophisticated traffic information via DAB and comprehensive marketing by broadcasters; and
5. Work with the European partners, including the European Commission, to develop a common European approach to digital radio. We have approached the European Commission

to encourage them to lead a community-wide effort. Such an approach, as was adopted in digital television, could provide certainty well in advance for vehicle manufacturers and those providing in-car devices to bring the unit price of conversion down.

Quentin Howard added, "We have already engaged with the European automotive industry to address the other points in Lord Carter's report, including using digital radio to deliver more sophisticated live traffic information directly to the car and sat-nav systems".

The WorldDMB Digital Radio Receiver Profiles, which we developed together with the European Broadcasting Union and the manufacturers trade organisation, DIGITALEUROPE (formerly EICTA) are playing an important part in enabling governments, regulators and broadcasters across Europe to plan a more certain future for digital radio. The Digital Britain Report makes specific reference to the WorldDMB Receiver Profiles and identifies the need for a common logo for digital radios, a process which has already started as part of the Receiver Profiles work.

Recent legislation in France requires the radios in all new cars to be digital by 2013 and the Digital Britain report mirrors that requirement through the support of the UK automotive industry which have expressed support in principle for such a recommendation.

Commenting on the report, Vauxhall's Group Product Manager in the UK, Stuart Harris, told the DRDB: "The certainty of digital switchover provided by the Digital Britain report will enable us to develop our support for DAB still further and we believe we are in a good position to comply with the recommendations for the car industry contained within it."

The Digital Britain report by Lord Carter, the British Minister for Communications, is the culmination of intensive work by the Department of Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DIS) and deals with a number of digital media issues including broadband access, content rights and digital radio.

ENDS

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About WorldDMB:

WorldDMB is an international, non-governmental organisation with a mandate to promote the awareness, adoption and implementation of Eureka 147 based technologies worldwide. The organisation's name refers to 'digital multimedia broadcasting' including radio, mobile TV and broadcast new media services. Its members include public and commercial broadcasters, receiver manufacturers and other companies and bodies committed to the promotion of services and equipment based on the Eureka 147 family of standards

Extracts from the Digital Britain report concerning radio:

The benefits of a broadcast specific platform for radio:

- Radio is fundamentally a portable medium and a broadcast specific platform is the most appropriate way to deliver mobile digital radio, particularly to cars;
- It is currently the most effective and financially viable way of delivering local radio digitally;
- Receivers are already affordable, portable and easy to use;
- It is free at the point of access for all listeners;
- A defined space for radio, where it can be master of its own destiny and have the freedom to take risks;
- Supports a UK radio broadcasting sector providing content specifically for UK listeners; and
- Increases the opportunities for UK-based independent content providers.

19. To date more than 9 million DAB receivers have been sold in the UK, and sales are continuing to grow year on

year. DAB ownership is up 19% year on year, with 32% of adults now claiming to live in a DAB-enabled household. Consumer satisfaction is also high. DAB accounts for 63% of total digital listening, compared to 11% on the Internet and 17% on digital TV.

20. We are clear that at least for the foreseeable future DAB is the right technology for the UK. However, it has always been our intention that the ultra-local services which remain on FM after the Digital Radio Upgrade should only do so temporarily. To ensure, as much as possible, that any additional digital upgrade will have a minimal impact on listeners we will seek to ensure that all digital radio receivers sold in the UK meet at least the WorldDMB profile 1.17. One way this could be achieved is by clear labelling such as the 'digital tick' used in Digital TV Switchover.

38. One other aspect of our national infrastructure – that of sound radio – requires a clear direction from Government. The diverse and flexible nature of the medium places it at the forefront of device and platform convergence. It has many routes to digital, piggy-backing on other platforms – the Internet, mobile phones, digital broadcast television, satellite and cable. But as a medium it is more than just another stream of audio. Its appeal to the listener is that it is portable, intimate, and ambient as a medium. Those aspects cannot easily be delivered unless radio has its own dedicated digital medium – DAB – for which 9 million sets already exist in homes and cars

39. The Government accepts that analysis and proposes, with the industry, the supply chain and consumers the process of Digital Upgrade so that all our national broadcast radio stations are DAB-only from the end of 2015. To that end, the Government is looking to the BBC to extend national DAB coverage so that it is at least comparable to FM radio coverage; and to the supply chain to deliver a range of DAB radios at the key sub-£20 price point that makes swap-out economic. The Government will also work with the automotive industry, and with the Commission and other key member states in Europe (one of whom has already indicated its intention to prohibit analogue-only radios in vehicles from 2013) on the five point plan set out in this Digital Britain Report to enable the majority of the vehicle parc to be converted to digital before 2015 and with low-cost converters for the remainder.

41. Digital Upgrade could also lead to the flowering of community-based ultralocal radio services bringing together the smaller of the local commercial stations with the growing community radio sector on FM radio. The Government accepts the case for some liberalisation for the community radio sector. By the time of Digital Upgrade, FM as a nationwide mainstream-quality medium would be coming towards requiring its own analogue rebuild: the infrastructure is 30 years old in places and beginning to degrade. A £200m nationwide rebuild is impractical for a small sector which is anyway migrating to digital. But much smaller care and maintenance capital expenditure could sustain the infrastructure for the community and ultra-local tier of radio for many years to come.

Notes to Editors: The foundation standard DAB and related standards such as DAB+ and DMB can be seen and heard in nearly 40 countries from Canada to Australia, across Europe and the Far East. Countries including India and South Africa are testing DAB and developing consumer trials. More than 500 million people worldwide are within range of a DAB/DMB transmitter, and there are over 1000 services on air. Created from the onset to enable mobile reception with audio, video and multimedia capabilities, the DAB standard has recently extended its lead into the world of mobile multimedia delivery through its compatible DMB application. DMB offers a mobile TV and audio solution and shares the same core standard, infrastructure and receiver technology. The launch of the world's first Mobile TV services took place in Korea in December 2005 using DMB technology and will be the basis for the launch of digital radio in France in 2009. DMB is on-air in China in five major cities including Beijing, and more DAB, DAB+, and DMB services are expected to launch in Europe during the next year. The addition of DAB+ as a highly efficient audio coding has been ETSI standardized and many countries throughout Europe and in the Asia Pacific are planning commercial launches of DAB+ digital radio services in 2009.