

Ed's comments

In early October, I was contacted by a reader who alerted me to the announcement by Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ) that it is to cease broadcasting RTÉ Radio 1 on long wave with effect from October 27th. The full press release titled *RTÉ Radio 1 Moves from Longwave Transmission in new focus on FM, DAB and Digital Access* can be found on the RTÉ website and accessed via the following TinyURL!

<http://tinyurl.com/mmpggwl>

The press release includes the expected justifications for the closure – cost, very few listeners will be affected by the move (2 per cent), improved sound quality, the opportunity for listeners to access RTÉ Radio 1 in a ‘new’ way and, “...*the end of long wave is compensated for by the availability of RTÉ Radio 1 on various digital platforms through the television in your home, the phone in your pocket, the tablet on your lap or the digital radio in your region.*” So, the broadcaster shuts down a single AM transmitter that affords coverage to the whole of Ireland and can also be picked up by the Irish diaspora and other listeners

in Britain (and beyond) using ‘low tech’, low energy consumption receivers. Meanwhile, the ‘very few listeners’ affected either give up or are coerced into migrating to ‘higher tech’ and probably more power hungry and expensive methods (if mobile phone or broadband charges are incurred) of accessing what was, to all intents and purposes, a ‘free’ service. In reality, the listeners in Ireland who are most likely to be affected by the shutdown are those who are the least likely to make use of the new ways of accessing RTÉ Radio 1 programme content. As for the Irish diaspora and other listeners in Northern Ireland and mainland Britain, they will have to listen online or access RTÉ Radio 1 via Freesat (Channel 750) or Sky (Channel 0160).

With less than five weeks between the issuing of the press release and the closure date, there’s very little time for interested parties to lobby for a rethink.

J P Coakley, RTÉ Radio Director of Operations, said, “*This move to digital platforms is in line with other public service broadcasters such as the BBC in the UK and VGTRK in Russia,*

who have announced the closure of their longwave services.”

Admittedly, the BBC has said it’s planning to end its use of long wave at some time in the future. Nevertheless, at the time of writing, there was no specific date for the cessation of broadcasting Radio 4 long wave on **198kHz**.

Radio 4 long wave still provides a very valuable service to those of us who live in parts of the country with marginal digital audio broadcasting (DAB) signals and listen to programmes such as the *Daily Service*, *Test Match Special*, the *Shipping Forecast* and *Yesterday in Parliament* via a radio, rather than on online (via a smartphone or computer) or TV. Let’s hope the ‘required’ maintenance on the two 700ft masts that support the Radio 4 long wave antenna (undertaken between the end of March and the middle of July 2014) gives that part of the Radio 4 long wave infrastructure the potential to remain functional well beyond the next BBC charter renewal.

In addition, let’s hope the intermittent loss of service isn’t a way of managing the migration of long wave listeners to other platforms.

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