

TCITC PUBLIC NOTICE 2008 – 4

Re: Spectrum Allocations pertaining to the 700 MHz Band

25 September 2008
Telecommunications Commission
Turks and Caicos Islands

Introduction

The Commission has received an application from Cable and Wireless (TCI) Ltd. (C & W), for approval of a spectrum licence in the 700 MHz band as shown in the attached documentation submitted by the company.

The company has pointed out that the frequencies sought in the licence application are in accordance with the draft Turks and Caicos Islands table of frequency allocations published recently in the Commission's web site (www.tcitelecom.gov.tc).

The company has also provided information relating to the recent decision by the FCC in the United States, to reassign the frequencies in this band that were formerly utilized for transmission of UHF television signals, that are being freed up due to the conversion to digital television technology. The assignment includes eighteen blocks allocated to fixed and mobile telecommunications services.

C & W has applied for approval to use the frequencies at 746 – 757 MHz, paired with 776-787 MHz, known as Block C in the FCC plan shown in the C & W attachment.

Issues to be Considered

The Commission invites comments on the C & W application, but also wishes to receive comments on broader issues raised by the application, as follows:

1. Use of the 700 MHz band

While it is acknowledged that the Commission's own plan allows for fixed and mobile applications to be approved in this band, it also includes Broadcasting, which is meant to accommodate any UHF television stations that may be established in Turks and Caicos Islands. It is not clear what the impact the use of this part of the band might be on potential UHF television stations, and comments are requested on this aspect of the spectrum plan.

2. Block Assignments

C & W has provided information relating to the FCC assignments, and for consistency with our neighbouring state, the Commission would be inclined to utilize a similar arrangement if there are no negative implications for Turks and Caicos. Comments on the appropriateness of adopting this plan should also be submitted.

3. Pricing of Spectrum

It has generally been acknowledged that this band of frequencies is extremely valuable, potentially, with its inherent coverage advantages over current technologies. This may suggest that fees for use of the spectrum could produce economic benefits that exceed those resulting from other areas of spectrum. However, in a small market such as Turks and Caicos, the Commission is more concerned with effective use of this technology, and deployment of new, more cost effective services along with attendant innovation that can be applied in the public interest.

Comments are therefore invited on appropriate pricing approaches that may be considered by the government in licensing usage of this area of spectrum.

4. Timing Issues

The Commission is concerned that whatever pricing mechanism is adopted for assigning blocks in this band, that the frequencies assigned are actually used, and not “warehoused” for some future utilization. It will therefore insist that in the terms of any licence granted in this band, exploitation and implementation of the new service platform be commenced on a nationwide basis within 6 months of the granting of the licence. Operators should take this into consideration before making application for usage in this band.

The Process

The Commission invites comments from interested parties on these, and any other issues that may be raised by the C & W application, and the issues noted above, with a deadline of November 15th, 2008.

At the completion of the process, the Commission will determine the next steps in this process, including the use of the band, pricing, and other licensing criteria. It will then determine whether to proceed with consideration of the C & W application, or to invite the Company to consider a revised application in light of the criteria established by the Commission for this band.