



NEWS RELEASE

Local TV firm plans full digital service

CORK, October 17, 2001 -- Southcoast Community TV has given a cautious welcome to the decision by Ms Etain Doyle, the Director of Telecommunications Regulation, to issue a consultation paper on local/regional digital broadcasting, and has submitted its views to her office (the ODTR).

Southcoast applied for a digital licence in the 11.7-12.5Ghz band in November 2000, and is quietly confident that the ODTR's consultation with interested parties will lead to a decision to grant it a licence.

The company, based in Carrigaline, Co Cork, serves upwards of 70,000 households in Co Cork, parts of Kerry, and west Waterford, using the UHF band to add UK terrestrial TV channels to the available Irish channels. If Southcoast receives a digital licence, it plans initially to offer subscribers a standard package of 20 TV and 18 radio channels, with a further 12 TV channels available for a premium package.

The ODTR called for consultation in response to Southcoast's licence application, and the closing date for submissions was last Friday, October 12. The issues covered included the various options for regional/local digital TV transmission, licensing conditions, spectrum availability and other considerations.

While glad to see that consideration of its licence application will finally get under way, most members of Southcoast feel that only the application of legal pressure has taken the process this far.

"We applied for a digital licence almost a year ago, with the intention of complying with the regulator's requirements for a seamless rollout of digital service from UHF," said Eric Curtis, honorary secretary of Southcoast, "but it wasn't until we took legal action to seek a judicial review that this response to our application was forthcoming".

Southcoast and its technical experts have prepared and submitted a detailed response to the questions raised in the ODTR's discussion document.

"We are confident we can deliver a digital TV system that will provide the competition the regulator says she wants. Our international telecommunications consultants, Professor Ray Hills of Britain and Edward O'Gorman of Limerick, are adamant that we can deliver this service in accordance with International Telecommunications Union regulations and European guidelines, that is, without causing any interference to satellite-based systems operating at similar frequencies," added Curtis.

Southcoast, which has a 16-year track record of supplying high quality TV reception, has successfully tested a revolutionary French technology which uses extremely low-powered transmitters in the 12.5Ghz band. This technology can provide up to 1,000 TV channels plus high-speed internet access, and offers the possibility of video-on-demand. It has recently been licensed for the first time in Europe, in Iceland, for the transmission of digital TV. The 12.5Ghz band is unused at present in Ireland, and provides more than adequate bandwidth for digital TV transmission.

When Southcoast receives a digital licence, it will use this technology to expand its coverage and supply a top-quality service in its area. A small antenna, the size of a pint glass, and a set-top box are required to receive signals, and the standard service will be available for £11.99 per month, at least 30% less than the rates charged by cable, MMDS and satellite companies for similar services.

Southcoast plans to invest upwards of £8 million in its new digital network.

The company believes its submission to the ODTR will help clarify many of the issues concerning digital broadcasting and open the way to competitive local and regional digital TV supply. In addition, Southcoast sees the 12.5Ghz band as a key avenue for the development of true community television services, where local news, information, educational and training programming, and other material would be transmitted on a separate channel as part of TV service.

Southcoast already has studio facilities in place to provide a community channel as part of its standard service package.

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