

Trunked Radio Communications

800 MHz Re-Banding

Get Ready NOW!

A few months ago, we discussed the history of 800 MHz re-banding. We covered the history behind 800 MHz congestion, the parties involved in the re-banding issue, and their efforts to find a suitable solution. We also covered the approved solution to the 800 MHz issue, as decided by the Federal Communications Commission, after much debate and discourse.

Well, things have progressed a bit since then. In May of 2005, the FCC announced that the 800 MHz re-banding would begin on June 27, 2005, and would progress sequentially based on region, until the entire country has switched to the new band plan. After it's all said and done, public safety systems around the country will be moved to a new area of the spectrum. All of the sudden, scanner enthusiasts, who had been casually following the 800 MHz re-banding effort for some time, were forced to ponder a question: What will happen with my scanner once my local public safety's system switches over? Or to put it more succinctly: "Am I going to have to shell out more money?"

Well this is the question we are going to try and answer, in this month's Trunked Radio Communications Column.

Who's affected?

Before panicking, or breaking out your credit card while sobbing uncontrollably, let's first cover which agencies will have to switch. To put it simply, any agency with frequencies in the National Public Safety band of 866 to 869 MHz will be affected by the re-banding, and will have to relocate to the 851-854 MHz band. Current users of 851-854 MHz will be moved to 854-860 MHz. When it's all said and done, the new band plan will look like this:

- * 851-854: dedicated Public Safety
- * 854-860: Public Safety/Critical Infrastructure users
- * 860-861: expansion band
- * 861-862: Guard band
- * 862-869: ESMR systems like Nextel and Southern LINC.

When is it gonna happen?

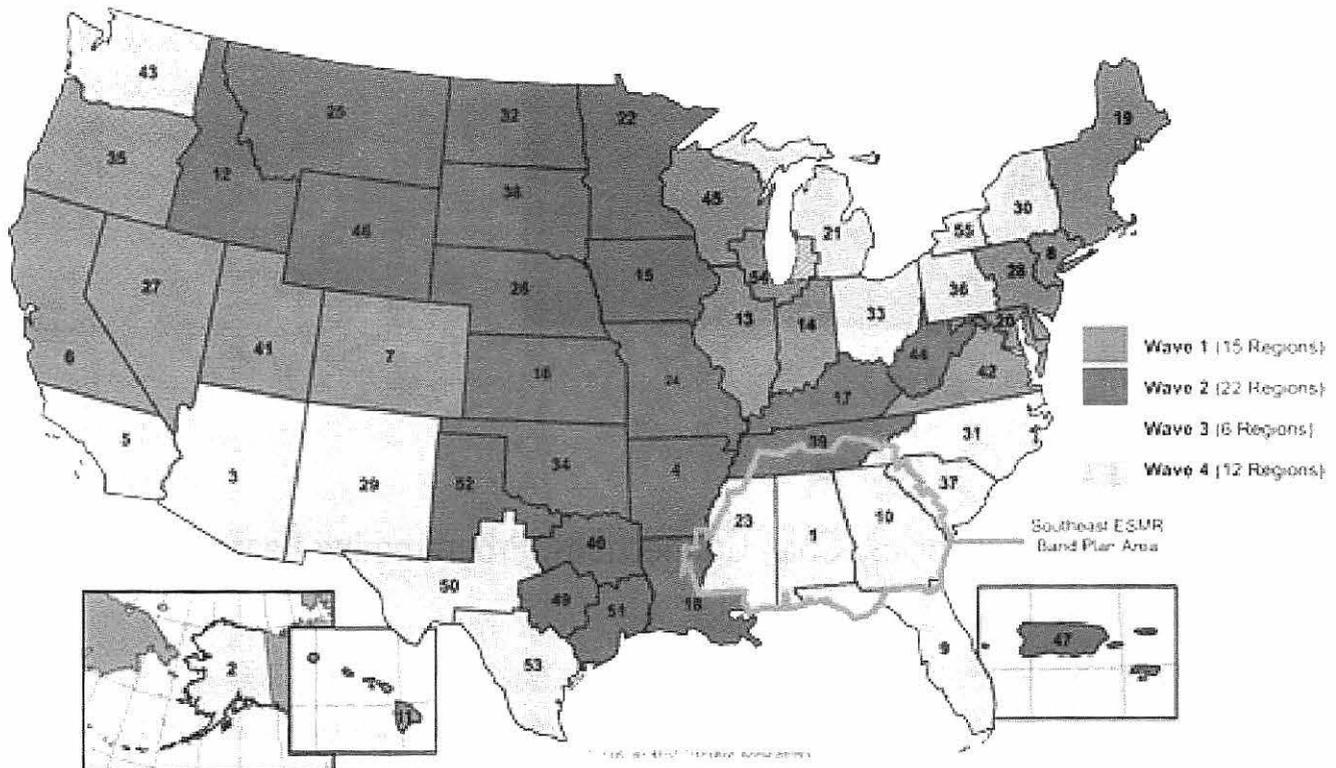
Both the FCC and the Transition Administrator, the committee in charge of overseeing the frequency changeover, have set the timeline for the re-banding. In setting the times, both bodies recognized that changeovers would take time, and require careful planning. Thus, flexibility has been built into the plan, to try and accommodate every contingency. To ensure that the entire country was not in the midst of a changeover at the same time, timelines have been staggered into four "waves" (areas), based on NPSAC regions.

- * Wave 1: Regions 6, 7, 8, 13, 14, 19, 20, 27, 28, 35, 41, 42, 45 and 54
- * Wave 2: Regions 4, 12, 17, 18, 25, 46, 32, 38, 22, 26, 15, 16, 24, 34, 39, 40, 44, 49, 51 and 52
- * Wave 3: Regions 1, 9, 10, 23, 31 and 37
- * Wave 4: Regions 3, 5, 21, 29, 30, 33, 36, 43, 50, 53 and 55

You can refer to the map to find out into which region a particular area falls. But depending on which wave they are in, system administrators will be scheduled to start a "phase of negotiation" by a specific date.

- * Wave 1 will be required to start by the third quarter of 2005.
- * Wave 2 will be required to start by the fourth quarter of 2005.
- * Wave 3 will be required to start by the first quarter of 2006.
- * Wave 4 will be required to start by the second quarter of 2006.

It's important to note that these timelines are only the beginning of the process of re-banding. Nevertheless, the process will be underway, and scanner enthusiasts will want to start planning for the change.



Will I have to buy a new scanner?

If you're a penny-pincher (like myself), the first question on your mind will likely be: "Will I have to buy a new scanner?" This depends entirely on which scanner you already have. If you have one of the *LATEST* generations of trunk-tracking scanners, you will likely only have to send it in for reprogramming. I've created a list below, which was accurate at the time of writing:

*Uniden Scanners BC296D, BC796D, BC898T, BCT8, BC396D, and BC246T.

*Radio Shack Scanners PRO-96, PRO-97, PRO-2096, and the PRO-92 (NOT THE 92A or the 92B).

If your scanner is **NOT ON THE LIST**, and if you want to listen to MOTOROLA TRUNKED SYSTEMS in the BANDS AFFECTED BY THE 800 MHz REBANDING, THEN YOU WILL NEED TO BUY A NEW SCANNER.

Let me pause so that can sink in. Those among us who get upset at the thought of having to spend yet more hard-earned money might want to break out the Kleenex at this point.

It's important to note that if the affected system is EDACS or LTR, you do NOT need to buy a new scanner. Since EDACS and LTR use similar logical channel numbering schemes, they won't be affected. Of course, you will still need to reprogram these, since the frequencies will change. But you knew that already, right?

And for those hobbyists who bought the Uniden BC250D or the BC785D, thinking we were ahead of the curve for the next few years? Well, the joke is on us. We now have really

nice conventional scanners. Or perhaps really nice EDACS or LTR scanners. Or something. Aren't you glad you bought that early digital scanner? I know I'm pretty miffed about the whole thing.

Even if your radio is on the above list, it will have to be reprogrammed. Unless you have the PRO-96 or 2096, this will likely involve sending it back to the manufacturer. The PRO-96 and PRO-2096 support "Custom Table Range Configurations" which may end up allowing users to simply reprogram them, thereby avoiding all further hassle. But if you don't have a PRO-96 or PRO-2096, you should contact your scanner manufacturer for further information on reprogramming. If your scanner isn't on the list above though, be prepared for a "Please buy or latest/greatest!" type of response.

Look in this column for more information as it becomes available! Until next month, keep on trunking!
(Readers, please find more information on the upcoming re-banding in Steve's Scanner Shop column.)