

Group W going all-news in Chicago

'Transition team' from company's other stations working on shift that will put WMAQ in competition with CBS's WBBM

pared for the June deadline deals with technical standards, allocations and receiver performance. The second on psychoacoustics (the level of expectation that consumers have when listening to the AM band) was explained in detail at a joint session of the technical and allocations subgroups of the FCC's Radio Advisory Committee, held last Wednesday (Dec. 16) at NAB headquarters.

Consultant Bronwen Jones, who is organizing the psychoacoustic study for NAB, presented a draft proposal of the test goals and procedures. The overall goal of the study, she said, is to determine the "signal quality expectations among radio listeners." Jones said that the study could be concluded four months after the sampling begins. Late January is a target for starting the study. One advisory committee member, NAB general counsel Barry Umansky, said that this would still leave the timing "tight" for preparing comments before the FCC's June 17 deadline.

Jones stressed the need for haste to find a facility for the study in the Washington area and to amass the necessary equipment. Among the audio equipment she said was needed for the tests were speakers, patch boxes, a sound level meter, a spectrum analyzer, audio processors and one AM and one FM stereo generator. The broadcasters on the advisory committee were urged to help facilitate the opening of the lab by helping to find equipment lenders.

According to the draft proposal, 100 people will be chosen randomly to participate in the tests which will take about two-and-a-half to three hours per person. Each will be asked to assess the quality of a series of seven-second sound bites on a scale of "best imaginable" to "worst imaginable." The tapes will include examples of signals with adjacent channel, co-channel and electrical interference in comparison with a high-quality reference signal.

Along with the discovery of general listener expectations, other information may include the difference in perceived sound quality between talking voices and compressed rock music; the quality perceptions between regular, narrow-band AM radios and radios built according to the NRSC standard; the effect of outside noise, such as the noise experienced while listening to a car radio, in the perception of the radio's audio quality, and the subjective differences between AM and FM radio.

Some possible problems with the testing plan were discussed during the meeting. Jones felt that up to three hours per subject is too long and tedious and could affect the results. She suggested ways to reduce the scope of the survey. Other committee members thought the study would be more useful if it included perceptions according to the subjects' age, sex, residence, and other demographics. But Jones and other committee members argued that a sample of 100 was too small to provide valid results on those "social science" issues.

Another joint advisory meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, Jan. 27, to discuss those problems and other possible complications. It was hoped that testing would begin soon afterward.

Westinghouse Broadcasting (Group W) is moving ahead with plans to change the format of WMAQ(AM) Chicago, its newest acquisition, from talk to all-news ("In Brief," Nov. 30) when the company takes over station ownership from NBC early next year. Group W Radio already has a format "transition team," headed by Dave Pearlman, vice president and general manager of easy listening KODA(FM) Houston, in place in Chicago. Also on the transition team are Scott Herman, executive editor for all-news KYW(AM) Philadelphia, and Cheryl Morton, program manager for MOR/talk KDKA(AM) Pittsburgh. (All three stations are owned by Group W.) The three Group W executives are likely to assume similar managerial roles at WMAQ when the transfer to Group W is complete.

"We are assessing the whole situation at WMAQ, both from a marketing and programing standpoint," said Pearlman. He noted that Group W Radio plans to employ about 100 at the station, which would nearly double WMAQ's present staff. As part of the hiring process, Pearlman said, the company is also interviewing the current WMAQ staff.

Group W will be taking on CBS's WBBM(AM) Chicago, a top ratings performer, with the all-news format. "WBBM is a good station, but we think we can provide an alternative news service [in terms of program elements]," Pearlman said. Group W, which operates 15 stations in 12 markets,

operates three all-news stations: WINS(AM) New York, KFWB(AM) Los Angeles (in both markets Group W competes with CBS-owned stations in all-news programming) and KYW. Each of Group W's all-news stations has its primary emphasis on local news (most of the programming except for network actualities and news inserts is locally produced) while the CBS all-news properties, for the most part, combine national network news and features with local news coverage. "We will pattern our approach [to all-news on WMAQ] very much like our other all-news stations, although with a Chicago slant," Pearlman said.

Along with local talk programming, Group W will drop Talknet, NBC Radio Networks' national nighttime service, from the WMAQ schedule when the full format switch is made to all-news.

WMAQ airs play-by-play coverage of Chicago Bulls basketball, University of Illinois basketball and football and Chicago White Sox baseball. It appears to be too early to know what sports programming the station will carry in its all-news format. "We have contractual arrangements with these organizations," Pearlman said. "At this time, we are proceeding with the current contracts."

Group W operated news/talk WIND(AM) in Chicago for many years before selling it to Tichenor Media Systems in 1985. Group W's reason for reentering the Chicago market, according to Dick Harris, Group W Radio president, is basically two-fold: to reestablish a presence in the nation's number-three radio market and to operate a 50 kw, clear channel facility.

Riding Gain

Bottom line

Audience estimates for Metropolitan Broadcasting's album-rocker WMMR(FM) Philadelphia, which, for the most part, has led the market in 12-plus metro share for the past several Arbitron quarterly rating periods, will be listed "below the line" (following all other metro station results) in the upcoming fall 1987 Arbitron market report for Philadelphia due to what Arbitron said was "rating bias." Results of the fall survey period, which ran from Sept. 24 through Dec. 16, are scheduled to be rolled out in early January.

According to Arbitron, WMMR sent listeners a promotional mailing of "Loyal Listener Packages," which included a "Loyalty Pays" entry form. The form's design, said Arbitron, has "strikingly similar to the design and wording of a page in an Arbitron radio diary" that could "potentially sensitize and/or confuse an Arbitron diary keeper." The promotion could "encourage" the "prioritized recording" of WMMR listening in the Arbitron diary, the rating service said. Some 200,000 of the WMMR "Listener" packages were sent out in October.

Arbitron said a cover note stating its position regarding the placement of WMMR's audience estimates will appear on page 5B

of the Philadelphia fall book as well as on the Arbitron fall computer tapes. Also affected is WMMR's listing in the Oct/Nov/Dec 1987 Philadelphia Arbitrends report.

ABC out of RADAR

ABC Radio Network's special long-form music/entertainment programming will not be in Statistical Research Inc.'s upcoming RADAR 36 report, due out in February. The network pulled its shows out of the biannual network radio rating service for "marketing reasons," said Bill McClenaghan, ABC Radio Network vice president of research services. "While agencies applauded ABC's use of RADAR, most continued to use Arbitron as the primary tool for evaluating long-form [entertainment] programming," McClenaghan said. ABC's special programming is now being marketed solely with Arbitron data. (Aside from Arbitron and RADAR, some agencies use Birch, Arbitron's competitor in local market radio rating, to evaluate various long-form programming.)

"We are also recommending that agencies base their buys on exact time clearances of the shows [instead of any Monday-Sunday data]," McClenaghan said.