



PUBLIC NOTICE

Federal Communications Commission
45 L Street NE
Washington, DC 20554

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Internet: www.fcc.gov

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WIRELESS TELECOMMUNICATIONS BUREAU ANNOUNCES TEMPORARY FILING FREEZE ON APPLICATIONS IN THE 450 MHZ BAND

WT Docket No. 24-629

By this *Public Notice*, the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau (WTB) announces a freeze, effective on January 17, 2025, on the acceptance and processing of new applications to conduct part 22 general aviation air-ground service operations in the 450 MHz band.¹ The Commission has proposed amendments to the U.S. Table of Allocations and its part 22 rules in order to allow for Uncrewed Aircraft Systems Control and Non-Payload Communications (UAS CNPC) operations in the 450 MHz band.² The purpose of this freeze is to maintain the existing licensing landscape in the band, and to permit the incumbent licensee to submit necessary filings, while the Commission considers the potential amendments to its rules that would permit these new operations.

Background

The 454.6625–454.9875 MHz and 459.6625–459.9875 MHz (450 MHz band) is primarily used for Air-Ground Radiotelephone Service (AGRAS) operations to provide communications capabilities to aviation subscribers.³ The Commission's Universal Licensing System (ULS) database shows that, as of January 17, 2025, there are 53 active general aviation air-ground licenses/call signs, all of which are held by AURA Network Systems OpCo, LLC (AURA).⁴ AURA is the only incumbent licensee and operator in the 450 MHz general aviation air-ground band. In 2021, WTB issued a waiver allowing AURA to offer additional ancillary services, including services to UAS, and as a condition of that waiver, AURA submitted a petition for rulemaking to update the Commission's rules to permit UAS CNPC operations in the band.⁵ In light of significant support for AURA's petition in the record, the Commission proposes in the *NPRM* to update its rules to allow UAS CNPC operations in the 450 MHz band.⁶

Specifically, the Commission proposes to update the allocation in the 450 MHz band to allow for certain UAS data communications, in addition to the air-ground radiotelephone service.⁷ Further, the

¹ See 47 CFR § 22.807.

² See *Facilitating Opportunities for Advanced Air Mobility*, WT Docket No. 24-629, Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, FCC 25-7 (Jan. 17, 2025) (*AAM NPRM*).

³ See *AAM NPRM* at para. 7.

⁴ Based on an FCC Universal Licensing System Advanced License Search on January 17, 2025 using the following search parameters: Service Group = All, Match only the following radio service(s): CG - General Aviation Air-ground Radiotelephone, Status = Active, Authorization Type = All. See FCC, *Universal Licensing System, Advanced License Search*, <https://wireless2.fcc.gov/UlsApp/UlsSearch/searchLicense.jsp> (last visited Jan. 17, 2025).

⁵ See *AURA Network Systems OpCo, LLC and A2G Communications, LLC Request for Waiver*, WT Docket No. 20-185, Order, 36 FCC Rcd 262 (WTB-MD 2021) (*2021 Order*); see also *AAM NPRM* at para. 8.

⁶ *AAM NPRM* at para. 10.

⁷ See *id.* at paras. 10-13.

proposal would add a definition for UAS CNPC to the part 22 rules and transition the licensing regime from what is now a site-based approach to a single geographic license with nationwide coverage.⁸ As the band's lone incumbent operator, AURA has constructed a nationwide network providing general aviation air-to-ground services from 53 sites across the United States and some of its territories.⁹

The shift from a site-based regime to geographic licensing would be carried out through a voluntary request from the covered incumbent to transition one of its site-based licenses to a nationwide geographic license, and to simultaneously surrender all of its other site-based licenses.¹⁰ The Commission's proposal would define the covered incumbent as an applicant eligible for the nationwide license who can demonstrate that: (1) it provides coverage at 25,000 feet over the contiguous United States (CONUS), Alaska, and Hawaii, using all available communication frequencies; and (2) the locations of the sites used to provide this coverage prevent the authorization of any other entity to provide contiguous, regional service using multiple communication frequencies.¹¹ The covered incumbent's application to transition to a single exclusive, nationwide license would be voluntary.

Filing Freeze in the 450 MHz Band

The Commission has proposed new eligibility criteria which would give the covered incumbent the option to transition one of its site-based licenses to an exclusive, nationwide license. This freeze is therefore necessary to preserve the 450 MHz spectrum landscape and avoid the filing of mutually exclusive applications while the Commission considers its proposals for the band's future.

Effective immediately and until further notice, WTB will not accept or process applications for new licenses to conduct part 22 general aviation air-ground service operations in the 450 MHz band, but this freeze does not apply to any new applications that are pending as of the date of this *Order*.¹² The freeze also does not apply to any filings submitted by an incumbent licensee related to its existing licenses, such as modification applications on 450 MHz band licenses.¹³

The decision to impose this freeze is procedural in nature and is therefore not subject to the notice and comment and effective date requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act.¹⁴ We find good cause not to use the notice-and-comment procedures and not to delay the effective date of the freeze until after publication in the Federal Register because such delay would undermine the purpose of the freeze, which is to maintain the 450 MHz licensing landscape while the Commission weighs its options for the band's licensing structure.

For further information, contact Christine Parola, Mobility Division, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau, at 202-418-7851, or by email at Christine.Parola@fcc.gov.

Action by the Chief, Wireless Telecommunications Bureau.

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⁸ See *id.* at paras. 15-17.

⁹ 2021 *Order*, 36 FCC Rcd at 263-64, para. 4.

¹⁰ *AAM NPRM* at para. 19.

¹¹ *Id.* at para. 18.

¹² See 47 CFR § 22.807.

¹³ See 2021 *Order*, 36 FCC Rcd at 269, 272-73, paras. 17, 26-28.

¹⁴ See 5 U.S.C. § 553(b)(A), (d); see also, e.g., *Neighborhood TV Co. v. FCC*, 742 F.2d 629, 637-38 (D.C. Cir. 1984) (holding that the Commission's filing freeze is a procedural rule not subject to the notice and comment requirements of the Administrative Procedure Act); *Buckeye Cablevision, Inc. v. United States*, 438 F.2d 948, 952-53 (6th Cir. 1971); *Kessler v. FCC*, 326 F.2d 673, 680-82 (D.C. Cir. 1963).