

Update on Swiss FM radio switch-off

and

the ongoing debate

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2025/6 – Two years full of changes

- **Public radio (SRG/SSR) switched already off FM**
  - on 31 December 2024: Reason to save 15 million francs per year of FM transmission cost – The result: half a million listeners lost
- **On 9 September 2025**
  - the lower chamber parliament (National Council) adopted a motion with 124 against 62 votes to abandon the planned deactivation of FM radio in Switzerland to until the end of 2031
- **On 9 December 2025**
  - The upper chamber (Council of States) endorsed this National Council motion
- **On 11 December 2025**
  - The public broadcaster SRG/SSR announced that they will come back on FM as early as possible
- **In autumn 2026 the SRG/SSR announced to be back on FM**
  - First only with the main transmitters that cover only 80% of the population

FM switch-off was much critisized

- **Main argument: It positions Switzerland in isolation in the heart of Europe with a black hole for FM radio and still millions of older cars without a DAB+ radio in Switzerland and all other European countries**

  - **None of the Swiss neighbouring countries has yet a plan to switch-off FM**

    Because

  - **Millions of receiver products with FM and RDS-TA/TP and RDS-TMC can no longer receive Traffic warning information – a nightmare and a severe security issue for vehicle drivers using cars made before 2021**

- **In 2025, the Swiss road authority ASTRA switched-off FM radio in all tunnels inclusive St.Gotthard (16.9 km)**
- **In Swiss road tunnels up to 100 Swiss DAB+ radio programmes are now transmitted and with no regard to traffic info**
- **Problems caused by this will be the subject of another presentation**

Traffic info no longer important ?

- There are still more than one million cars without a DAB+ radio being driven on Swiss roads
- As Switzerland is also a transit country for millions of foreign cars without a DAB+ radio, these get no Swiss traffic information any longer on FM
- Each car using Swiss motorways has to pay an annual tax, called Vignette
- Swiss motorways have heavy traffic, are exposed to extreme weather and have many longer road tunnels
- Traffic information on FM delivered in the past by public broadcasting was widely appreciated

RDS – The Radio Data System: a milestone in the history of broadcasting traffic information

DAB+ is not like FM a pan-European system

- 2011: Portugal put an end to trial DAB broadcasting
- 2022: UK commercial radio – The FM radio licences were prolonged until 2032
- Today: There are only few countries in Europe with a DAB/DAB+ listening on a weekly basis of 10% or more: UK, Norway, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland
- 2026: New policy objectives for France and Spain: national broadcasting shall give priority to DAB+, yet without a switch-off FM plan
- Other European countries switched off DAB or do not want it any longer
  - Finland, Sweden, Latvia, Lithuania, Hungary, Romania, Albania and Ireland
- FM radio on the contrary is still the most used broadcasting technology worldwide
  - On the international level (e.g. ITU) it is still impossible to forecast its end
  - FM radio with RDS and RDS2 has many data transmission options, such as text, pictures, remote switching, etc.
  - FM radio with RDS for mobile reception has strong features such as service following

All car radios in Europe have FM with RDS

The future of radio is seen as IP streaming with the BBC predicting that streaming will eventually overtake FM

In our own view

- **We think that**
  - This view from the BBC is correct
  - DAB+ is only a transitional radio technology
  - It will not last for long and it will be replaced by IP streaming
  - However, for local and regional and even national radio FM will remain attractive as radio receivers without FM are a rare exception
  - **In Switzerland each DAB+ radio sold is also an FM radio**
    - **Thus, there is no reason, other than political, why broadcasters can no longer use FM**

Since 2020 there is also a new standard on 5G Broadcast:

- **This is a BC multicast complement to IP Unicast for smartphones**

The future is digital, but also FM radio uses widely digital technology

Some misinformation on FM clarified

- **Because the future is digital, does radio really need to migrate to DAB+ ?**
- **What is not said in this context is:**
- **Since long already FM also uses digital technology**
  - Transmitters are fed with audio in stereo and metadata digitally
  - Only the audio in stereo is transmitted as an analogue signal
  - All metadata are transmitted digitally using RDS/RDS2
  - New is: Over RDS2 Station logo, Slideshow, and a Link to IP streaming are possible
  - Audio stereo quality from FM radio is better than from DAB+
  - Modern FM transmitters consume up to 40% less energy compared to old ones
- **Modern FM radios decode with DSP the audio and RDS digitally**
  - They use since long ICs that are very inexpensive
  - Modern car radios decode DAB+ and FM and all their metadata only by software
  - **Since FM remains widely popular in Europe, there will be no radios on the Swiss market without FM within the next 10 years !**
  - **Thus, FM radio should continue to be used for radio in Switzerland**

Switzerland could not use the FM band for other services as it is bound to international agreements

The Swiss Regulator is responsible

- One of Swiss OFCOM's tasks is the sensible management of frequency spectrum
  - This is a limited resource
  - This must be done in serving the economic interests of the country, and in harmony
  - with the neighbouring countries and
  - to be technological neutral

For ITU Region 1 (Europe/Africa/Parts of Asia)

- **The FM radio frequency plan of Geneva 1984 remains valid**
  - **It can only be modified using the criteria fixed in this agreement**
  - **This international agreement permits Switzerland to continue FM radio still for many years to come**
  - **Just like the neighbouring countries continue FM radio**
  - **If Switzerland discontinues FM radio, it cannot reuse the FM band for other services**
  - **Thus, Switzerland is deprived of radio spectrum worth millions for its economy**
  - **FM radio is a controversial issue for the Swiss population, since it finances this through the obligatory media reception fee, the highest worldwide.**

Swiss traffic alert info: very important for safety on Swiss roads



- **The most important traffic alert messages concern:**
  - **Persons driving by error on motorway lanes in the opposite direction**
  - **Lost loads, Animals on the motorway (very frequent dangers)**
  - **Extreme weather conditions:**
    - **Heavy rain, snowfall and black ice, land slides, avalanches …**

Important traffic information needed

- Closed roads and railway problems caused by floods, landslides and avalanches as well as ongoing road and railway line mainetnance works
- Tunnel problems caused by road works and accidents
- Recommendations for alternatve routes
- Railway cancellations and alternative transport services made available

- **NOTE: The SRG/SSR has increasingly become reluctant to provide such information frequently in its radio programmes, contrary to what it did in the past. As an alternative an app for smart phones is now proposed.**

There is no technical reason to switch-off FM

- The public Swiss broadcaster SRG/SSR is funded by the public media licence fee.

- An increase of 5 CHF/year is sufficient to collect the money needed to continue FM by this public service broadcaster – just a matter of a correct media policy in the interest of the population !

- The annual funds of SRG/SSR are 1550 millions CHF; the savings are 15 millions CHF.

- Is DAB+ operation really less expensive overall?

  The SRG/SSR is silent on this issue.

Swiss authorities pushed for DAB+

- **The public broadcaster SRG/SSR was an early adopter of DAB**
  - First it started with DAB in the nineties and then it changed to DAB+
  - More than 500 000 DAB receivers became already garbage as with DAB+ they did not work anymore
  - The Swiss regulator BAKOM/OFCOM supported the FM switch-off
    - **5 million Swiss Francs were spent to advertise that radio will changeover to DAB+ only**
    - **80 million Swiss Francs were already used to subsidize private broadcasters to migrate to DAB+**
    - **Millions of public funds were thus lost for things the public never asked for**
  - Since 2020 there is even no obligation any longer for the public broadcaster to use FM, but it shall DAB+ instead and at the end of 2026 for the SRG/SSR a full area coverage as it had existed for FM is not yet available for DAB+, which is unsatisfactory for car reception.

Last not least: Is FM really outdated technology ?

- **No, not at all: Almost everything in the transmission chain from broadcast studio to consumer receiver is already digital !**
- **Only the FM used on transmitters is analogue**
- **FM radio can now use enhanced metadata with RDS2**
- **RDS2 is an option, standardized worldwide since 2018, not yet fully implemented**
- **Implementation on the transmitter side appears to be possible with software only**
  - This issue is currently under study by the RDS Forum
- **RDS2 permits to add visual information to the radio programme:**
  - Station logo
  - Slideshow with music cover art, fully synchronized with music items
- **RDS2 permits also to achieve service following for connected cars**
  - In this way the IP radio stream can significantly enlarge the programme service range

What is finally better – FM or DAB+

1. A well designed FM radio sounds better than with DAB+ (currently broadcast with minimum data rates)
2. VHF has a slowly degrading fringe area and the received audio does not stop there suddenly
3. FM is extremely cost-effective and used worldwide, both for broadcasters and listeners
4. FM is broadcast on the most appropriate of all broadcasting frequency bands (Bd II)
5. FM has additional digital functions/metadata that are in no way inferior to DAB+
6. FM (although an analogue broadcast signal) can now be made digital from the studio to the software defined receiver
7. FM broadcasting technology is simple and cheap and no one is dependent on a provider
8. FM broadcasting technology is also cheap for individual program providers
9. FM is significantly better than DAB+ for informing people in shelters in the event of a crisis or disaster
10. FM transmitters (in Switzerland) consume only 2/3 of the electrical energy of all DAB+ stations

- DAB+ is an SFN system and therefore has no multipath propagation problems
- DAB+ has more program channels than FM (is that really an advantage?)

This is a gain of 10:2 in favour of FM!

More background information

To consider by politicians supporting the FM switch-off:

- https://www.theregister.co.uk/2018/05/22/digital_future_is_not_dab/
- http://digitalradioinsider.blogspot.com/2018/03/the-impossible-mission-global-future.html
- https://www.meinungsbarometer.info/beitrag/Haende-weg-von-UKW!_2814.html
- https://www.presseportal.de/pm/6895/4036268
- https://www.radioszene.de/117361/norwegen-radio-armageddon.html
- https://www.radioszene.de/175031/dab-radionutzung-norwegen.html
- https://www.uplink-network.de/rollout-smartfm-in-deutschland/
- https://www.worldcastsystems.com/en/c66m374/press-release/germany-as-the-first-country-to-massively-roll-out-smartfm-taking-action-to-reduce-energy-costs-and-carbon-footprint

- RDS Forum Members and our other professional contacts have reviewed this presentation for correctness
- We used also a number of press publications as a reference

- Contact us at the RDS FORUM
  - rdsforum@bluewin.ch
- Consult the RDS Forum web site
  - www.rdsforum.org
- Do not forget what Karl Valentin once said

"In the past the future was also better"

