

News

Digital switchover not likely before 2018

Tuesday, March 03, 2015

ROSE HALL, St James — A 2015 date announced previously for the island’s television stations to switch over from analogue to digital broadcast has been shifted for at least another three years.

The new proposed date of 2018 for the nation’s television stations to commence test broadcast in digital format was disclosed on Thursday by the executive director of the Broadcasting Commission, Cordel Green, during the Montego Bay Chamber of Commerce and Industry Power Brokers Workshop and Luncheon held at the Holiday Inn Sunspree Resort in Rose Hall.

“There has been a delay. What is now on the table is a 2018 date to begin testing digital television in Jamaica, hopefully, with a cut-over of 2020,” said Green. “But there is a proposal that is now on its way to Cabinet and that is going to be a Cabinet decision.

There is no date that is fixed, because it is the Cabinet which will have to decide the date for digital television switchover in Jamaica,” he added.

Green explained that the main reason for the delay has to do with the high cost of establishing the necessary transmission facilities, at a time when broadcasters are seeing a drop in revenue from advertising. “The main reason relates to the significant capital expenditure required on the part of the television broadcasters as the advertising market has been weak over the past year which pretty much reflects the state of the economy,” Green argued.

The National Steering Committee on Digital Switchover (DSO) had recommended 2015 as the deadline for the switch-off of analogue television signals and the start of a full digital television infrastructure.

In April 2012, Minister with responsibility for Information Senator Sandra Falconer said she intended to seek Cabinet approval for 2015 to be year when the switchover would take place.

Speaking at a meeting of the committee at Jamaica House in Kingston then, Falconer explained that the DSO study would review Jamaica’s readiness and carrying capacity for the switchover.

She said it would also examine public policy considerations; a substantive economic analysis of the market with projections for the future of the digital market; and the consumer take-up of the different platforms and willingness to pay for services.

“Attention will also be given to the matter of the potential impact of analogue switch-off; the estimation of the value of the released spectrum; cost-benefit analysis of the digital switchover process; cost points and options for funding; and importantly, technology selection, access and usability by persons with disabilities or other vulnerable groups, and environmental considerations,” she said then.

The Broadcasting Commission in 2010 had announced the push to have television and radio broadcasting entities go fully digital by 2015, but the Media Association of Jamaica had raised concerns that given the expense involved, five years was too short a time frame within which to make the switchover.

The MAJ further contended that no consultation was done with television and radio licensees in setting the deadline.

The association also said that it was curious as to why the time frame set for Jamaica was shorter than other Caribbean countries as well as that of Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Peru, Singapore, India which could better afford an aggressive switchover timetable than Jamaican businesses and consumers. Digital Broadcast uses coded orthogonal frequency division multiplexing modulation in comparison to analogue which uses amplitude and frequency modulation.

Digital transmission allows for better picture and audio quality and for more programmes to be transmitted in the same channel bandwidth, in comparison to analogue which transmits a single programme on a channel, and is also susceptible to interference.