

# COMMENTS WITH REGARD TO THE FUTURE OF THE NATIONAL TRAFFIC SYSTEM



## MICHIGAN SECTION OF ARRL

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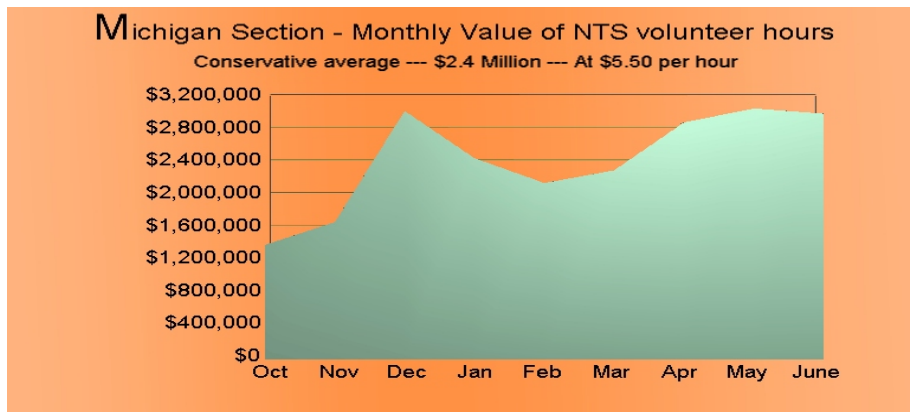


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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	
Forum description . . . . .	1
Comments from Michigan amateur operators . . . . .	2
Statement of Reason for Comments . . . . .	3
Trends and Opportunities	
Discussion of Recommendations . . . . .	5
Keep NTS . . . . .	5
FCC Licensing Pool . . . . .	7
Analogy to Postal and Telephone Delivery . . . . .	8
Stimulate Recruitment . . . . .	9
Recognition of individuals . . . . .	10
Delivery Contract . . . . .	11
Gateway Station . . . . .	12
Value of Service . . . . .	13
Interoperability Guidelines . . . . .	14
Documentation	
Exhibit 1 . . . Gateway Station . . . . .	16
Exhibit 2 . . . Lupton Roster . . . . .	18
Exhibit 3 . . . Michigan Emergency Test Septex 89 . . . . .	19
Exhibit 4 . . . Source of Connecticut New Jersey training materials . . . . .	22
Exhibit 5 . . . K7BFL 2003 NTS Survey . . . . .	24
Exhibit 6 . . . 1915 and 1940 Illustrations of traffic routes. . . . .	26
Exhibit 7 . . . Message loads and active Participants . . . . .	27
Exhibit 8 . . . 1999 - 2003 Activity on Michigan circuits . . . . .	28
Exhibit 9 . . . Report illustrating estimated value of volunteer services . . . . .	29
Exhibit 10 . . . 2001-2003 SEC and STM frequency of reporting . . . . .	30
Exhibit 11 . . . WB8RCR research and statistics . . . . .	31
Exhibit 12 . . . Written Communications . . . . .	37



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On July 12, 2003 members of the ARRL Section leadership and ARPSC community gathered at the *Woodlands Campgrounds* near Lupton, Michigan. Those present were participating in an annual four day retreat hosted by Michigan Section Leadership.

The gathering is open to all amateur radio operators interested in public service and the ARRL. It is widely publicized on amateur radio nets, through e-mail distributions and in ARRL meetings held prior to the event. Attendees usually include individuals from Michigan, Ohio and Kentucky.

Activities at the retreat typically include presentations on topics of current interest, training programs, meetings of Michigan Section officials, a Great Lakes Division meeting and various recreational activities. The 2003 outing included a forum where opinions were solicited for this written communication.

This document was developed as a method of conveying to ARRL officials opinions concerning the National Traffic System (NTS). It was written by K8CQF, Michigan's STM with assistance of the STM staff. They include special work by Assistant STMs John McDonough WB8RCR and Dennis Wilkinson, VE3EUI and Saginaw County Michigan AEC Rick Schattilly, KC8VOA.

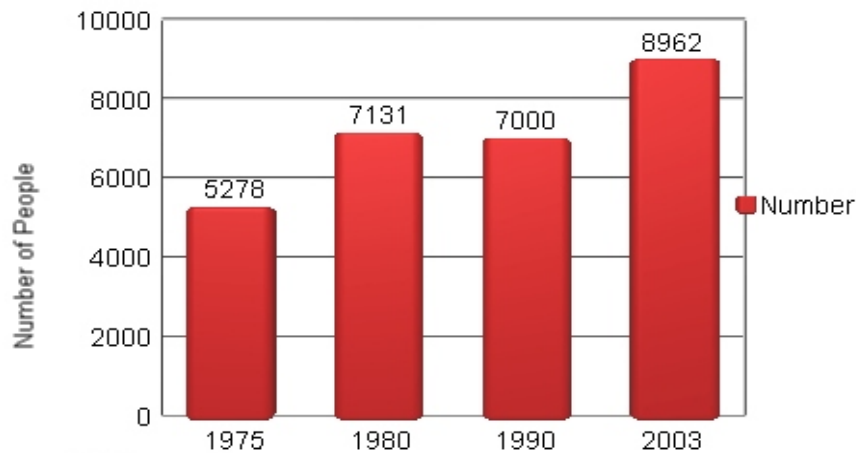
Information contained herein was circulated among Michigan ARRL leadership officials. The document contains copies of well known background material on the NTS, results of original research, and written comments received from individuals. Opinions for the document were solicited on-the-air, at the forum and via internet electronic mail. We were particularly delighted to have the benefit of leaders from the Ohio and Kentucky Sections being present during deliberations.

As a result of efforts just described, nine suggestions are being forwarded ARRL. The suggestions are: 1) the NTS is an important component of amateur radio and should not be abolished; 2) questions relevant to the operation of amateur radio communication networks and emergency message handling should be included in the FCC's test question pool for amateur radio licenses; 3) amateur radio

operators should be aware that delivering messages via internet e-mail is analogous to delivery via telephone or postal service ; 4) the group acknowledges that the pool of amateur radio operators may be declining slightly and it is our recommendation that recruitment activity for NTS participation be increased; 5) there should be an attempt to more frequently publicly recognize the contributions of individual NTS operators; 6) amateur radio operators participating in the NTS should be clearly informed that by accepting a message for service they have entered into a “contract” to properly handle the message; 7) it is recommended that ARRL national leaders adopted the concept of a “Gateway” station for each section; 8) it is recommended that those with oversight of NTS activities estimate a minimum dollar value of the contribution NTS volunteers provide to our country and within ARRL Sections each year and distribute the information; 9) it is recommended that national guidelines be established to address issues of “interoperability” as outlined herein.

Elaboration and supporting documentation comprise the body of the report. In addition to the wonderful work of Michigan’s amateur radio community and Mr. Steve Ewald of the ARRL, we gratefully acknowledge hams from Connecticut, Ohio, New Jersey, North Carolina and Texas who’ve contributed to this report through their labors both past and present.

## ARRL Field Organization Appointments



Source: ARRL Annual Reports

According to a search of amateur radio statistics shown at QRZ.com on February 1, 2003 there were a total of 622,962 licensed operators issued to the US and its possessions. The 8,962 field appointees represent about 1.4 percent of that base and about 6 percent of the ARRL membership. Michigan’s 2000 ARPSC volunteers represent about 10 percent of its licensed amateur radio population.

## STATEMENT OF REASON FOR COMMENTS



A suggestion has been laid on the table. “The National Traffic System doesn’t deserve our support...traffic counts are down and the system concept is one hundred years old.”

### **The question before us is: How shall we proceed?**

“The aim of argument or of discussion should not be victory, but progress.”  
Joseph Joubert

“No problem can stand the assault of sustained thinking.” Voltaire

## Trends and Opportunities

There is a sense of “change” blowing in the wind. Powerful social and technological forces have greatly influenced how we live and communicate. This “change” in our world has many facets. Even though trends associated with it seem unclear, responses are needed and important actions must be taken.

For example, the new terrorist threat to the United States coupled with great leaps in modern communication technology have led individual amateur radio operators, various organizations and leaders within those organizations to examine how to best communicate in times of emergency.

At the same time, interviews with knowledgeable parties and searches of records from various data sources suggest that the number of active amateur radio operators in the US is declining. ARRL membership seems to have declined only slightly or it may have plateaued. Surprisingly, however, the number of individual amateurs

holding “Field Appointments” has been rising. The ARRL’s leadership seems to be providing for more, better trained volunteers in case of need.

Some regard amateur radio as a “dying” hobby, while at the same time governments are freeing up frequency spectrum for exclusive use by amateur radio operators and the US Space Agency NASA continually encourages astronauts to secure amateur radio licenses. Would fewer operators mean less congestion and more circuit capacity?

In order to provide reliable, survivable, redundant communication services under these conditions, leaders across the amateur radio world are re-examining fundamental premises in amateur radio public service.

Michigan amateurs are proud of their long history of public service. ARRL records cite the first documented formal emergency communication network as one between amateurs in Michigan and Ohio. Just as our members have tried to help in the past, contemporary radio operators in Michigan want to do all they can to support those individuals faced with making decisions during this transitional period.

In the sincere hope that the information provided herein will be useful to others, we feel that now is an appropriate time to contribute information we’ve gathered and share judgements based upon our experiences.

