
BBC Radio 2 Extension Service Proposal Appeal

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To BBCAudioproposals <BBCAudioproposals@ofcom.org.uk>

Dear Ofcom,

I was disappointed to hear the news concerning Ofcom's (initial) rejection of the proposed BBC Radio 2 extension service and wish to register my thoughts and opinions ahead of the 14th May appeal deadline.

In short, I don't think there's enough choice on UK radio for older listeners who want a varied mix of music, longer-form speech and entertainment, together with the opportunity to hear again some of the rich and revered BBC archive.

(And now, at length ... Strap yourselves in) ...

I understand that part of the ire is over predicted audience figures for R2X. That might have some credence if it can be proved how much of that would be made up from people switching from other radio stations. My suspicion is that the listenership would, in reality, comprise largely of those, like me, who cannot find anything else of long-term edification to listen to and not from listeners to Boom, Greatest Hits Radio etc, who appear fiercely loyal and have absolutely no intention of returning to the BBC. I have not seen a single on-line post or newspaper letter to suggest that any of Boom's listeners, for example, would go back to the BBC ... So what's the problem? Furthermore I suspect a great many of the projected would actually come from Radio 2; Those like me who still love much of what they currently do, but crave alternatives geared more towards their (older) demographic and wider taste in music, speech, lifestyle and entertainment.

The playing field for broadcast radio is more equal than it has ever been with most stations having platforms that can be heard nationwide (Smart speaker / app / website / DAB) so surely any perceived 'BBC advantage' over such a service is not as strong an argument as it once was.

There is also now too much licence (literally) given to commercial radio 'spin-off' stations specifically geared at targeting older listeners (Eg: Boom Lite, Boom Rock / Greatest Hits Radio 60's / 70s / 80s). For the BBC to be denied just one additional station for older listeners I think is unreasonable, particularly when you consider people are paying a licence fee for such a service.

Wouldn't the most effective way to gauge potential listenership and competitor threat be to grant a limited 'pop-up' service. In this way we could actually hear what the station might sound like. If scheduled across two or three days, perhaps illustrating different format proposals. Only then can a more realistic and informed decision be made as to its long-term validity and subsequent effect on the competition.

Should the above makes no difference whatsoever to your decision, I maintain that there remains an opportunity to do something fresh, exciting and unique which would have little impact on the BBC's commercial rivals. Doing nothing should not be an option, given, as mentioned, how readily the

commercial sector can launch spin-off stations which are progressively chipping away at the BBC's older audiences. At what point can the BBC legitimately and competitively respond?

What Boom Radio does is fantastic; I enjoy brief visits to hear Simon Bates' show and Phil Riley's excellent 'Choices' programme, but as someone younger than their core demographic, I crave a broader music and entertainment mix. Greatest Hits Radio also does great business for older listeners, but, by definition with a limited and heavily rotated playlist.

The main – and widely publicised – protagonist of the current objections has of course been Boom Radio. Wikipedia defines 'Boomers' as people born between 1946 and 1964. I was born in 1969 – part of the 'Gen X' age group. I believe we are rather unique in our appreciation of music; We were exposed to standards, light classical and show tunes as kids from our parents – but we went clubbing in the 90's. As a consequence, the parameters of our music appreciation can be more vast, varied and eclectic than any other generation and certainly more than any current radio station would dare to programme. It's this non-threatening demographic - of which I am squarely a part - that I feel the BBC should re-purpose its Radio 2 extension pitch towards if the current application fails. A bridge, if you like, between R2 and Boom rather than a (perceived) competitor. If you've ever listened to presenters like Liza Tarbuck, Frank Skinner, Jonathan Ross and Danny Baker – all of whom I adore – you'll perhaps get the sound, style and approach I have in mind. All have wildly eclectic tastes in music. Ross, for example, will play movie music on his Classic FM programme and be equally at home with the sort of hip-hop, rap and grime featured on his TV show. Frank Skinner enjoys everything from George Formby to The Fall ... and does a poetry podcast!

If you can hit upon classy, melodic, credible, accessible, but hugely diverse, unpredictable music plots other stations wouldn't go near or object to – in daytime at least – you're halfway there:

For example ... (Subjective I know, but merely used as an illustration of the above) ...

Judy Garland – 'Lucky Day'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1oGIJRaT8g>

Skee-Lo – 'I Wish'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6NsvxTrlg8>

Khachaturian – 'Waltz From Masquerade'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnnXe1SDGrE>

Ariana Grande – 'Yes and...'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5poZluqTbA>

Doris Day – 'Just Blew In From The Windy City'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJFbDOijLmk>

The Girl Next Door – 'Salsoul Nugget'

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruUElxwpAxE>

... There are a million other similar examples of diverse styles and genres that would sound great together. I listen to 'Sunday Worship' on Radio 4 and used to enjoy 'Sunday Half Hour' on Radio 2. I personally think what Ray Moore used to call 'God's Greatest Hits' ... (Google him, kids) ... would also sound terrific in the mix; 'Praise My Soul The King Of Heaven' ? ... Come on! A belter. There could then be scope to schedule the archive content from the original R2X proposal in the evenings or overnight where they'll do less damage to the opposition, but will still have a valuable outlet, 'live' and on catch-up. Ditto less mainstream, but equally varied music, meaningful speech and entertainment shows, perhaps presented by some of the many now out-of-work BBC Local Radio presenters ... (ahem) ... but more of that immanently.

Another notion:

Assuming Radio 2's remit is still to serve adult listeners from, what, 35 to the grave? Would splitting their existing frequencies and scheduling the planned R2X proposals on the now less publicised 88-91 FM – even if just at the weekend – be more acceptable? Capital Radio did this in 1988 when Capital Gold launched after the IBA urged stations to end simulcasting. R2 would continue on DAB, on-line, app, smart speakers etc.

Finally, but perhaps crucially. I was indeed one of a number of BBC Local radio presenters whose adult music and companionship programmes were cancelled as the result of Ofcom backing to re-shape the network. The merits or otherwise of that continue to be debated. What isn't debatable is the fact that listeners to those programmes still have little in the way of suitable alternatives on the BBC, but again, are expected to pay a full licence fee. It's like Netflix being told they can't show drama programmes as it might damage other broadcaster's output – but still charge a full subscription. Is it right that we're effectively being pushed towards commercial radio because there's nowhere at the BBC for us to go? Something surely has to give and worth remembering, some people just simply prefer the way the BBC does something.

For the love of radio, any sort of additional adult music service you grant for Radio 2, I believe, will be a hugely exciting and important part of BBC radio's development and legacy.

Thank you for listening. I look forward to your response and hopefully a peaceful outcome that satisfies all.

Sincerely

Mark Punter – BBC Archivist – South East Today