

# Transition to Digital Television with Extended Timeline for U.S./Mexico Border Region



## SITUATION ASSESSMENT

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Congress has mandated that spectrum currently used by broadcasters for analogue transmissions of their signals be returned to the government no later than February 17, 2009 as that spectrum has long been promised to public safety users.

The bill provides that every household will be entitled to request two \$40.00 coupons for the purchase of an HDTV converter. It is not clear whether you may apply on-line or by mail, but the Act does require that all coupons be forwarded to the recipient by US mail. The legislation makes clear that coupons may not be combined toward the purchase of a single converter. So, if speculation is wrong and converters cost more like \$80.00 than the \$50.00 experts claim, a consumer cannot double up the coupons to purchase that converter. Finally, coupons will only have a three-year shelf life.

The bill provides \$990 million for the program, but it can be automatically increased to \$1.5 B if the NTIA certifies that it needs the money.

Laredo supports its local television stations request for an additional amount of time to make the transition from an analog to a digital environment but is not clear what the City can do.

The legislation further provides that beginning October of 2006, there will be \$1 billion fund for acquiring and deploying interoperable communications systems. The funds are available on a 4 to 1 match (i.e. local government needs to provide at least 20% of funding) for a program that will run through 2010. The law further provides \$43.5 million be made available for Enhanced 911 services as defined in 47 U.S.C. § 309(j)(8)(E).

While the law is a plus for public safety, there are challenges to be addressed by Laredo constituents especially since studies reveal that communities the transition will hit hardest are Spanish speaking populations. Laredo's television viewership is dependent on Spanish broadcasts that may not be carried on local cable. There are also a vast majority of households that are dependent on over the air broadcasts.



## BACKGROUND

The impoverished border population of the southwestern United States is struggling to get adequate public services, such as in the colonias surrounding Laredo. Some of these areas do not even have running water and for them to be able to afford to transition to television sets that are digital capable and be adequately served is unrealistic in a span of a two years. The timeline for digital television implementation must be made with consideration to socioeconomic and demographic factors as a matter of definite course. A technological gap already exists in Laredo. People depend on local off-air signals from local television stations for information in event of an emergency. Implementing digital television without taking into consideration the aforementioned would severely hinder the ability for these communication outlets to assist in disseminating emergency public information to all sectors of the community.

## SOLUTION

Allowing for the transition to extend to 2013, to give the U.S./Mexico border region television stations ample time to be able to serve their respective communities.

## TARGET AGENCIES

- Federal Communications Commission
- National Telecommunications and Information Administration

