# Safeguarding the future of radio in connected cars: AER position on the European Electronic Communication Code (EECC) revision and proposal for Digital Networks Act

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**Radio remains a vital source of trusted, high-quality information for European citizens, including during emergencies when electronic communications networks and power grids may fail and people are on the move. 91% of car buyers believe it's important that their current or future car includes FM or DAB/DAB+ radio. This makes cars a critical space for audiences to be provided with radio. However, radio broadcasters face increasing competition from global digital platforms and streaming services integrated into connected car infotainment systems. As most car manufacturers operate globally, they increasingly prioritise global partnerships with these platforms, over direct relationships with European radio operators. This trend is further exacerbated by the growing number of new vehicles being sold without radio receivers (this applies to electric vehicles in particular). The ongoing review of the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC) and forthcoming proposal for a Digital Networks Act (DNA) present a timely opportunity to secure radio's presence in cars. Legal protections are needed to ensure that listeners can continue to have free and unfettered access to their favourite radio stations in cars, and allow radio to continue to make a significant public value contribution to society.**

**In particular, AER asks for the following:**

- **All new vehicles of classes M and N placed on the EU market should be equipped with hybrid-capable radio receivers that support FM, DAB+, and IP.**
- **It must be ensured that radio remains easily findable and accessible, e.g. by a prominently positioned radio button.**

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**Radio is a cornerstone of the in-car audio experience**, as confirmed by a recent international study from WorldDAB and Edison Research[1]. Radio is still the most listened-to audio platform in vehicles. 91% of recent and prospective car buyers state that having FM or DAB/DAB+ radio in their current or next car is important. This underscores radio's enduring popularity among car drivers and the clear need to ensure it remains a central feature of in-car entertainment systems.

## Why radio remains essential in cars

### 1. High listener demand

Radio continues to be the most preferred audio platform for drivers, valued for its familiarity, ease of use, and universal and free accessibility. Notably, 80% of car buyers said they would be less likely to purchase a car without radio. Unlike streaming services that require users to pay for monthly data plans and subscriptions, radio remains free-to-air and free-to-access. Seamless integration of broadcast and IP - through deep linking - further enhances the in-car radio experience, making it the most practical and cost-effective choice for drivers.

[1] Dashboard Dialogue Edison Research for WorldDAB, June 2023

## 2. A trusted source of information

Radio has consistently ranked as the most trusted form of media in the EU for over a decade, according to Eurobarometer surveys[2] by the European Commission. It delivers reliable news, traffic updates, weather forecasts, music, entertainment, and talk content with simplicity and reach. In an era of information overload and substantial amounts of disinformation, radio stands out for its credibility and clarity. Radio supports media pluralism through its provision of highly trusted news content to audiences on a one-to-many basis. Because radio broadcasts information to all listeners simultaneously, it ensures equal access to content regardless of an individual's background, location, or social status. This simultaneous transmission prevents the prioritization of one group over another, making radio an inherently inclusive and democratic platform. As a result, it functions as a pluralist medium, accommodating a diversity of voices, perspectives, and interests within society. As radio has been a well-regulated medium for many years, it has high service standards, and does not carry harmful content or material designed to deceive or mislead.

## 3. A lifeline in emergencies

In times of crises, such as natural disasters or major emergencies, broadcast radio plays a critical role in keeping the public informed. It provides timely, accurate, and accessible information when electronic communications networks and power grids are damaged or no longer function, providing a critical safety and alert function for society. When all else fails, radio remains a stable and reliable means of communication and source of information. Broadcast radio often is the only way for people to stay up to date with news and public safety alerts and recommendations. The recent power outages in Spain and Portugal due to a grid issue and in Ireland due to widespread storm damage highlighted the crucial role of radio, especially since car radio receivers can keep working long after power grids, mobile networks and the internet fail. Mobile networks have significantly more limited geographical coverage compared to FM and DAB+ networks. This is largely due to the superior frequency propagation characteristics of FM and DAB+, which outperform the relatively short-range frequencies used by mobile networks. The difference in reception is especially noticeable when driving through sparsely populated areas, away from highways and urban centres.

## 4. Cost-free and seamless listening

Radio must remain free at the point of use, while enabling innovation through hybrid and deep-linking to IP-based services. Unlike streaming services, which depend on mobile networks and may result in data plan costs for users, radio via FM/DAB+ is free and widely accessible to people of all ages. These are key components to radio's enduring popularity in cars. As the industry responds to growing demand from listeners for complementary IP delivered audio services, hybrid radio[3] ensures seamless listening by combining broadcast and online delivery. IP connected radio apps are a new and complementary way of delivering interactive and on-demand

[2] Latest Standard Eurobarometer 102 - Autumn 2024

[3] **Hybrid radio** seamlessly combines Broadcast radio and the Internet. Your broadcast signal (DAB+, FM, AM) continues to carry audio, but a hybrid radio with an Internet connection (WiFi, 3G, 4G, LTE) can use that connectivity to improve the radio experience by providing visual data such as logos or station names, dynamic data such as now-playing information and artist images, as well as recommendations and other interactive features. A hybrid radio could also offer seamless switching between broadcast and the internet. If the over-the-air signal weakens or drops out, the hybrid-radio automatically switches to the station's online stream, ensuring uninterrupted audio.

features to listeners in cars, allowing greater engagement and laying the foundations for future innovation. If access to radio is kept simple, accessible and user friendly then this reduces driver distraction, contributing to public safety. A clear radio interface enables drivers to access (audio-)information quickly and without complex navigation.

**Ensure access to radio in all cars: a future-proof approach for EU policy**

To safeguard radio's continued presence in connected vehicles and ensure universal, cost-free access to trusted content, the EU must adopt a clear and forward-looking regulatory framework.

Radio remains a highly popular, reliable, and essential source of news, entertainment, and emergency information, especially in times of crisis. Its role in the car is indispensable and must be both protected and promoted.

**AER urges EU policymakers to:**

1. **Safeguard universal access to radio by mandating the inclusion of hybrid-capable radio receivers in all new vehicles sold in the EU.**
2. **Ensure Article 113 of the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC), which promotes DAB radio in cars in accordance with Annex XI, is fully upheld and strengthened, neither watered down nor abrogated.**
3. **Require that all new vehicle classes M and N placed on the EU market are equipped with:**
    - **FM and DAB+ radio receivers,**
    - **Hybrid radio chips that support software enabling seamless switching between FM, DAB+, and IP-delivered radio services and apps.**

AER supports a forward looking, technology-neutral approach to the mandation of hybrid radio that reflects the diversity of radio distribution across Europe. FM, DAB+, and increasingly IP, all play a vital role in the distribution of radio in cars. The EU regulation should support hybrid radio as a flexible and inclusive solution that is compatible with and allows for deep linking between the wider range of radio distribution modes in use across the EU. **All new vehicles placed on the EU market should be equipped with hybrid-capable radio receivers that support FM, DAB+, and IP radio**. Hybrid functionality ensures seamless switching between broadcast and online streams, maintaining uninterrupted, free-at-the-point-of-use access to radio across all environments and transmission modes. Ensuring **technical interoperability** across devices and vehicles is critical to protecting universal access to radio.

Radio services must be clearly visible, easy to access and easy to use within in-car systems, for example, through a **prominently positioned dedicated radio button** - either physical or on the in-car user interface. This ensures safe and immediate access to radio, reduces driver distraction, and supports road safety. As vehicle controls increasingly move to complex touchscreen menus, maintaining quick and intuitive access to radio is critical for helping drivers stay focused on the road.

Furthermore, extending hybrid radio requirements to **vehicle classes M and N**, not just private passenger cars, is important for ensuring **universal access to radio** across the entire mobility landscape. This includes commercial vehicles such as trucks, and also electric vehicles. These vehicle types represent **a significant share of road users** and often travel long distances across

rural or remote regions where broadcast radio is the most reliable and accessible source of information.

Ensuring that all drivers, regardless of what type of vehicle they use, have access to radio services via FM, DAB+, and IP is essential for:

- **road safety**: radio plays a key supporting role in the dissemination chain, especially for emergency or safety-critical information (e.g., accidents, road closures, severe weather conditions), ensuring timely alerts reach all road users[4].
- **democratic access to information**: free and universally available public interest content, such as news, cultural programming, and emergency alerts, must remain accessible to everyone on the road.
- **media plurality and social cohesion**: as vehicles become increasingly connected and digital platforms dominate, safeguarding access to radio in cars helps ensure that diverse, local, and independent media voices can be heard whilst listeners are on the move.
- **equity in the digital transition**: listeners must also be able to listen to their favourite radio stations in entry-level electric vehicles, some of which are now being sold without a receiver. Without legislative intervention, an access gap between those who can afford higher-end cars and those who cannot could emerge.

Finally, the UHF band must continue to be allocated to broadcasting, as this resilient frequency, with its excellent propagation characteristics, is the backbone to ubiquitous and universal radio reception, free at the point of use Moreover, the continued allocation of the UHF band to FM and DAB/DAB+ distribution is vital for media diversity, cultural sovereignty, and national emergency alerts.

**Conclusion**

To safeguard radio's indispensable role in the car, as a trusted, universal, and cost-free medium in the evolving digital mobility landscape, we must take decisive action. As vehicles become more connected and shaped by agreements between car makers and global digital gatekeepers, radio's future presence and societal value are at risk without clear, protective measures.
Maintaining existing **interoperability of radio in cars and building on this** is essential. This means requiring all new cars to be equipped with **hybrid capable radio receivers** that support FM, DAB/DAB+, and IP distribution: FM provides cost-free, widely accessible, reliable and resilient coverage; DAB/DAB+ offers efficient, high-quality digital broadcasting with expanded service capacity, IP supports innovation, enabling personalised, on-demand content delivery and interactive features.

A multi-mode approach is essential to address the diverse infrastructure, market maturity, and connectivity levels across Member States. It ensures equitable access for all audiences, regardless of the technology they use or the region they live in, while allowing the radio sector to innovate and evolve without compromising its public or societal value. Only by doing so can we

[4] Radio broadcasters are key partners in disseminating Safety-Related Traffic Information (SRTI) and Real-Time Traffic Information (RTTI). SRTI provides immediate hazard warnings - such as crashes, fog, ice, and hazardous spills, while RTTI delivers congestion and travel time updates along major routes. The role of radio as a trusted, resilient channel is widely acknowledged and essential for ensuring comprehensive traffic information across the EU, notably in areas with limited digital connectivity or during crises.

guarantee that radio will remain easily available to all drivers, regardless of technology or geography.

These steps are critical to uphold **radio's public value, cultural significance, and economic sustainability** in the evolving digital mobility landscape. The **upcoming proposal for a Digital Networks Act and revision of the European Electronic Communications Code (EECC)** provide EU policy makers with a golden opportunity to safeguard the future of radio in cars, building on the existing interoperability provisions in article 113 of the EECC.

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