

National Traffic System (NTS) Issues – February 2005

1. The “NTS” does not have a common Leader, other than the ARRL Board of Directors. This lack of a common responsive leader causes much difficulty when dealing with changes involving coordination between the various processes and systems involved with sending, receiving, and delivering radiograms.
2. Section Traffic Managers report to Section Managers. NTS Regional Nets and Area Nets report to an Area Chairman, who reports to ?? There are three Area Chairmen, who report to ?? Section Traffic Nets report to the STM in theory, but in practice probably report to no one person.

I had understood that ARES and NTS were to be considered as siblings under the “Public Service” banner of ARRL. That relationship has not been reflected in the reporting structure of the two siblings. I do not understand the change that “EMCOMM” will have to these relationships and organizational structures.

3. Very few radiograms recently sent could be considered “third party”. I would surmise that 98% are either NTS Activity Reports or “Spamgrams” between two radio amateurs. This lack of “real” radiograms is contributing to a lack of interest by the general amateur population to learn the skills needed to handle a radiogram, and becoming involved with handling radiograms. Section Traffic Nets are disappearing. NTSD Stations are closing. Operators are refusing to relay or deliver “Spamgrams”.
4. 40 years ago, radiograms were a popular method to exchange information because a long distance telephone call was much more expensive than a postage stamp, “instant” (incrementally free) email was not available, telegrams were much more expensive than a long distance telephone call. Radiograms were free (still are!) and a 2-3 day delivery time was usually faster than a letter via USPS. The relative economics of these different information-handling processes has done a complete “flip-flop” between 40 years ago and today.
5. “Independent” nets and persons handle radiograms, sometimes with, and sometimes without using portions of the NTS infrastructure. They can be viewed as “competitors” to the NTS.
6. New technology, such as Winlink 2000, has offered advantages (increased accuracy, Attachments, and reduced delivery time) to “customers”, which have further reduced the desire of customers to use the NTS infrastructure and the Radiogram format.
7. In recent years, the ARES/RACES has not made serious use of NTS. During “emergencies” direct paths are usually set up, by-passing the NTS schedules. Customers want the shortest delivery time possible, along with 100% accuracy. Non-relay voice (phone or radio) and email first....other methods second. Processes, which include ANY manual handling of a radiogram, come in Last Place.

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- I perceive that in general, ARES/RACES does NOT want to get involved with NTS processes, because those processes do not match ARES/RACES needs. ARES/RACES may desire the skills and equipment of NTS persons, if those skills and equipment are allowed to be managed by ARES/RACES persons.
8. The ARRL Radiogram is a fine instrument for transferring “customer information” between different modes and systems (Winlink, voice, cw, telephone, packet, etc.) in an accurate (if humans do not make errors) and uniform manner. However it lacks the ability to handle “higher level” information which customers are used to using via email, such as Attachments, Styles, etc.
 9. We have many radio amateurs who consider themselves “NTS Traffic Persons”. They are very dedicated persons; dutifully and skillfully checking into local, regional, and area nets, along with maintaining TCC schedules, Packet BBS, or NTSD Stations. They assume that “someday” their skills and equipment will be desired, and made use by “someone” during an “emergency”. “Someone” will “somehow” get the radiogram to his or her operating desk, ready to be sent. “Someday” is less likely to come than it was 40 (or 5) years ago, unless these persons can better match their offered services with the needs of today’s customers. Some of these NTS persons may want to change their offered services, if offered a chance; others may not want to change.
 10. If we don’t have it already, it would be very beneficial if there were a method, such as a email discussion group, which would enable persons interested in the process of handling “written messages” via amateur radio to present, debate, and reconcile the issues in a timely manner.

It would be good if we could have a 5 day convention to discuss and resolve these issues; complete with a Mission Statement, Goals, Objectives, Tasks, etc.; led by trained facilitators. Dreaming!
 11. We need to develop an organizational structure to better manage the “NTS”. By NTS, I mean the entire infrastructure involved with processing radiograms. Section Nets, NTS Region, NTS Area, NTSD, packet, pactor, voice, cw, VHF, HF, etc.. This could better be defined as a organizational structure which would either better match “NTS Services” with “Customer Desires”; or oversee the death of the NTS.
 12. In my opinion, the NTS is dying. ARRL needs to give it CPR if it should be revived. If the NTS is beyond hope, ARRL owes it to NTS Operators to put the NTS under the care of Hospice, in order to mitigate and ease the hostilities, bad feelings, pain, and suffering associated with death.