

## STATUS OF DIGITAL NTS IN FLORIDA

(About the same throughout the NTS system)

**BACKGROUND:** Bulletin board station (BBS) software standards have supported specific address/routing for NTS messages from their beginnings in the mid 1980s. The scheme is based on two expectations: (1) the existence of a vhf packet BBS to service each five digit ZIPCODE area, and (2) trained NTS operators on packet to service the BBS localities. That said, much coordination is required even if both criteria were met, which, sadly, they are not.

The criteria have never been met as (1) even at the pinnacle of packet activity in the early 90's there were not enough BBS stations to have one specifically located within each five-digit ZIPCODE, and (2) the NTS did not initially support the use of digital, so few NTS-trained hams participated. In some cases packet BBS sysops refused to accept NTS messages, and many NTS operators were adamant about not using digital modes. Both packet and NTS activities have diminished significantly since the availability of inexpensive e-mail. That said, both seem to be experiencing a bit of resurgence in the new millennium.

Routing of NTS packet messages is based on addressing a message as

ST ZIPFIVE @NTSXX

Where ZIPFIVE is the five-digit zip code of the addressee and XX the two-character postal designator for the state or province of the addressee. BBSs route NTS messages first by NTSXX, handing off the message to the next BBS along the way. Once inside the target state, messages are routed to the BBS that is considered the Home BBS (HBBS) for the specific ZIPCODE.

BBSs should not blindly route/forward NTS messages based on this system, as many will not find an HBBS as none has been established. Even where a BBS within the target ZIPCODE may be reached, there is no guarantee there will be an NTS operator on packet to service the message.

While many BBS sysops will deliver/relay NTS messages that arrive on their BBS, I feel they should not be expected to do so. More power to those who do.

**SOLUTION:** To take advantage of packet-active NTS operators where we can find them, an HBBS for *groups* of ZIPCODES is established. The HBBS may or may not actually reside within any of those ZIPCODES. This HBBS becomes a *mail drop* where the packet-active NTS operators can service the messages by telephone delivery or relay to VHF or HF nets. To accomplish this, one or more *NTS switches* are established within the state or region. All NTS messages coming into the state by digital modes are first routed to an NTS switch. The NTS switch then routes the messages to designated HBBS throughout the state on vhf or HF digital modes. Since the NTS switches are also on HF they also are used to route NTSXX messages leaving the state. NOIA.#cenfl.fl.usa.noam operates as an NTS switch on VHF and HF and is located near Orlando. Several other HF BBSs in the state participate.

Presently there are few NTS operators active on digital modes in Florida. Likewise, not many packetters are active on the NTS. However, the cross-trained group is growing and the rate is expected to increase with the upgrading of the Layered Packet Network throughout the state and

the growing interest in the use of digital networks for emergency operations. Because there are NTS packet operators near DeLand, FL, the N4GMU VHF BBS is the designated *mail drop* for many NTSFL ZIPCODES. NTS messages on N4GMU are cleared daily and relayed within the state on the 75m Florida Phone Net and local VHF traffic nets. Specific HBBSs are located on Local Area (packet) Networks in Jacksonville, Orlando, Sanford, and Ft. Pierce. Melbourne, West Palm Beach, and Ft. Myers will soon be on line through the expanding Layered Packet Network. The Jacksonville HBBS is serviced by WX4J who also operates an HF BBS.

As more local NTS operators get on packet, and the Layered Packet Network expands, the HBBS assignments will be changed to BBSs closer to them. As time permits, NOIA will update and distribute the NTSFL ZIPCODE addressing information @FLBBS. If BBS sysops keep this information up to date, it will not be necessary to first forward NTS messages to an NTS switch if a trustworthy route exists to the target HBBS.

All packeteers and NTS operators are encouraged to become involved in the digital NTS by offering to be a liaison between your local or section NTS net and digital BBS in your area. Contact your local BBS sysop, net manager, or Section Traffic Manager (STM) for details.

73,

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