

Phasing ALMA for VLBI – outcome of the Board Discussion.

E-mail exchange between Richard Hills and Shep Doeleman, Tue, 22 Sep 2009:

Dear Shep,

I was asked to convey the following to you on behalf of the ALMA Board.

Response to the VLBI proposal

The Board received the proposal "Phasing ALMA for (sub)mm-VLBI Observations" and heard comments from the ALMA Science Advisory Committee and the Project Scientist. It was agreed that phasing-up ALMA will be a valuable enhancement to the telescope and that it will make possible some very exciting scientific projects. The Board understands that the proposers plan to seek independent funding for all the resources required for this project. Nevertheless, it is clear that the work of phasing-up the array must involve close interactions with the ALMA staff responsible for the real-time control systems. This would inevitably cause diversion of key people from tasks which are on the critical path towards completion of baseline ALMA.

This need to divert key staff makes it difficult to accommodate the proposal at this time. In addition, the Board believes it is inappropriate to commit to one particular development project, however well merited, when the process to define and prioritize the full range of potential ALMA developments is not yet in place. The Board thus regards it as premature to endorse the VLBI proposal at this time. However, it encourages continuing discussions between the ALMA Project and the international VLBI community, with a view to achieving the objective of phasing-up ALMA most effectively. It also recommends that a broader collaboration involving VLBI groups across the ALMA partnership be explored.

I am sure this will be disappointing to you, but I do hope you will respond positively to the Board's encouragement of continued dialogue. I would certainly look forward to that myself. In fact there are already some technical issues that I want to take up with you which I will include in a later e-mail.

Best wishes
Richard

Dear Richard,

Please convey my thanks to the Board for their careful consideration of our proposal. It's true this is a disappointment, but I am aware that ALMA construction is of paramount importance, and that the ALMA development process has not yet been finalized. I note in particular the Board's mention of a broader collaboration. As I wrote you recently, the larger EHT program is indeed quite inclusive in its membership with participants from all ALMA partners. We will be convening an EHT collaboration workshop this January at Haystack to formalize agreements, timelines, coordinate efforts, and forge science collaborations. An announcement should be coming out soon, and I very much hope that you will be able to attend. In my view, this will be an opportunity to discuss consensus on ALMA phasing among many interested parties.

Many thanks for your efforts and counsel.

Best, Shep