VARA FM is significantly faster and more efficient than traditional Packet (AX.25) for Winlink on VHF/UHF, offering speeds up to 25kbps vs. Packet's 1200/9600 baud, making it ideal for quick messages; however, Packet is more robust in extreme overload due to its CSMA (Carrier Sense Multiple Access) and digipeating for range, while VARA FM "hogs" the channel but handles poor audio better with rate adaptation, allowing both to coexist on gateways for different needs.

VARA FM vs. Packet Comparison

Feature	VARA FM	Packet (AX.25)
Speed	**Much Faster** (up to 20x faster than 1200 baud packet; rate-adaptive)	Slower (typically 1200 baud on VHF)
Channel Access	**Channel hogging**; intended for single, full-channel sessions. Users must monitor frequency.	**Carrier Sense Multiple Access (CSMA)**; multiple stations can attempt to use the channel, the protocol manages collisions.
Performance	Rate-adaptive, adjusts to signal conditions, performs well with weaker signals and noise.	Less robust in poor conditions; performance degrades rapidly with high traffic or low signal-to-noise ratios (SNR).
Licensing	Requires a paid license for full speed and digipeater use (a free, slower version is available).	Open protocol, no licensing fees required for full functionality.
Compatibility	Does not detect packet transmissions and will transmit over them, causing both connections to fail.	Detects VARA FM transmissions as a busy channel and will wait.