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# Relay Texas Newsletter



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## RT Advisory Committee Meetings.

Highlights of the January & April meetings.

## PUC Selects Sprint To Serve Relay Texas

...for another five year term



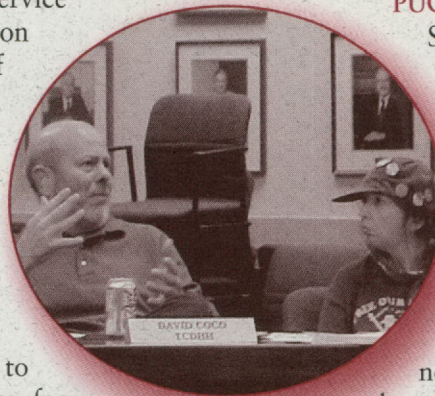
The Public Utility Commission of Texas (PUC) selected Sprint Corporation as the provider for the Relay Texas program until August 31, 2005.

The Commission named Sprint over other bidders as the best value for the state based on the company's high comparative ranking for service enhancements, cost, network sophistication and administrative reporting. A team of seven PUC staff with particular specialties (legal, accounting, and relay service issues) evaluated proposals from AT&T, Hamilton, and Sprint. The evaluators recommended that incumbent Sprint be selected to provide relay service in Texas and the Commissioners agreed.

In 1990, the PUC selected Sprint to provide the first statewide relay services for Texans. At that time, Texas was the first state to have Sprint as its telecommunications relay service (TRS) provider and it was Sprint's first TRS as well. As of today, Sprint provides TRS for 27 states - more than any other company.

During the first month of relay service in September 1990, Relay Texas agents processed approximately 50,000 calls. Today Relay Texas continues to add service enhancements and handles an average of 385,000 calls a month at no charge to the Relay user. Approximately 16% of the total relay calls are initiated by hearing persons. Nearly all of the \$11.4 million annual budget for Relay Texas is paid for by the Texas Universal Service Fund (TUSF), which is supported by all Texas telephone customers, including pager and wireless customers. Approximately 2.1 percent of the TUSF goes to Relay Texas

SKSK



### January Highlights:

The Relay Texas Advisory Committee met on January 14, 2000. The members welcomed three new members: Joseph Acosta Jr., Sandra Murgia and Jack Clifton.

### PUC Report

Southwestern Bell has implemented a new feature in parts of Central Texas such that customers making a call no longer get a busy signal. Instead, there is a recording that states that the line is busy. This can be confusing to TTY users, who rely on the flashing read light on their TTY to advise them if the line is busy. Customers may call Southwestern Bell and tell them if they do not want this feature and instead want a busy signal.

This is mainly information for vendors of Specialized Telecommunications Assisitive Program (STAP). Vendors wishing to expedite registration and payments for vouchers should send all correspondence directly to NECA. The address is:

Sabrina Standrige | NECA/80 S. Jefferson  
Whippany, NJ 07981

### Sprint Report

There seems to be slower growth in call volumes taking place the past few months compared to last year. It is possible that there is a leveling off happening at Relay Texas. Many other states experience this after 4 to 5 years. Relay Texas is in its 10th year. Sprint and the state of Maryland are doing a speech to text trial with their relay service. Instead of typing back to text users, relay agents

RTAC members David Coco & Rona Schnall, shown above.

Continued on page 5.



## FCC Releases Report & Order for TRS

New rules for relay service



In its introductory statement, the FCC states that "TRS is required to provide telecommunications services, which are functionally equivalent to voice services to the extent possible. *Functional equivalence is, by nature, a continuing goal that requires periodic assessment (emphasis added).* The ever-increasing availability of new services and the development of new technologies continually challenge us to determine what specific services and performance standards are necessary to ensure that TRS is functionally equivalent to voice telephone service. For example, the recent development of speech-to-speech (STS) relay services provides telecommunications link for persons with speech disabilities, and video relay interpreting (VRI) facilitates telecommunications for individuals who use sign language".

The FCC Report and Order includes:

- The definition of TRS is not limited to relay services using a TTY, and includes STS, VRI, and non-English language relay service;
- Requirements that telephone companies provide STS and interstate Spanish relay service by March 1, 2001.
- Encourages VRI services by permitting the recovery of the costs of both intrastate and interstate VRI calls from the interstate TRS Fund;
- Imposition of a minimum typing speed of 60 wpm for Communications Agents in order to speed the transmission of calls using TTYs;
- Amendments to the rules to minimize disruption during relay calls by establishing a minimum time (10 min) that a CA must stay with a call;
- A requirement that TRS providers automatically and immediately transfer emergency calls to the appropriate 9-1-1 operator and relay the caller's number to the operator orally;
- Clarification that the existing rule requires outreach to all callers and for all forms of TRS;
- A conclusion that section 225 of the Telecommunications Act does not prohibit us from requiring relay services to accommodate enhanced or information services;
- A requirement of relay services to include the ability to make pay-per-call calls;
- A requirement of states and providers to submit to the Commission a contact person or office for filing consumer complaints, to be posted on the Commission's web site;

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- The adoption of the Commission's informal complaint process for TRS complaints; and
- A requirement that state programs and interstate TRS providers to maintain a log of consumer complaints that allege a violation of the minimum standards and annually report to the FCC the number of complaints received.

Relay Texas will comply with all these requirements. These rules have not been printed in the Federal Register, so we do not yet know when the rules will be effective. Generally rules become effective within 30 days of printing in the Federal Register except for those rules that have time frame stated.

SKSK

## PUC files petition with the FCC

PUC asks FCC to reconsider English to Spanish translation decision



In the recently issued Report and Order regarding telecommunications relay services, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) stated that interstate non-shared translations (i.e. English to Spanish, and vice versa) made through relay services will no longer be funded by the interstate TRS fund. In the past, when a Spanish speaking person called an English speaking person via Relay Texas, if the call was made to another state or another country, the agent work time associated with that call would be paid for by the Interstate TRS (telecommunications relay service) Fund. The FCC will now fund only shared language translations (Spanish to Spanish).

What this means is that if an English speaking deaf person wants to call a Spanish speaking hearing person in another state or country, they would have to use a commercial translation service, and pay for such services. The PUC pointed out that using a commercial translation service would end up costing more for the deaf person or the person calling them, since they still must use the relay service plus TTY typing speed of about 35 wpm versus voice speaking of about 150 wpm. This is not functionally equivalent to what hearing persons enjoy. Also, there will be four people on the call - the calling party, the relay agent, the commercial translation operator and the called party which results double-interpretation situation, increasing the chances for error with more persons involved in the call.

The PUC filed a petition for reconsideration of this item. The PUC is hoping that the FCC will reverse their decision in this matter.

SKSK



## Proposed Sprint/MCI Worldcom Merger

Proposed merger causes a stir among relay users.



For those of you unaware, Sprint and MCI WorldCom are proposing a merger to the FCC. This has caused some concern among various groups that are major users of relay services. Below is a copy of the resolution presented to the FCC by the National Association of the Deaf, Telecommunications for the Deaf Inc., and the Consumer Action Network.

**MCI WorldCom-Sprint Merger Resolution**  
Submitted by  
National Association of the Deaf  
Telecommunications for the Deaf, Inc.  
Consumer Action Network  
April 5, 2000

**WHEREAS:** The Telecommunications Advocacy Network of the National Association of the Deaf (NAD), Telecommunications & Media Accessibility for People Who are Deaf, Late-Deafened, Hard of Hearing or Deaf-Blind (TDI), and the Consumer Action Network of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Consumers (CAN) have recognized the importance of ensuring high quality of relay service, and thus have concerns regarding the proposed MCI WorldCom-Sprint merger;

**WHEREAS:** Sprint has handled the vast majority of TRS call activity in the USA winning more state contracts than all providers combined;

**WHEREAS:** Sprint has been crucial in promoting and assuring acceptable quality TRS;

**WHEREAS:** Sprint has made concerted efforts to recruit and retain Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals for their TRS team;

**WHEREAS:** We are anxious to preserve and perpetuate a competitive arena in the TRS industry;

**WHEREAS:** MCI WorldCom, in the last few years, appears to be significantly reducing its commitment to the TRS industry;

**WHEREAS:** In a number of states, where MCI WorldCom has offered TRS, the poor quality of service and lack of continued commitment has resulted in states entering litigation, assessing liquidated damages, and/or demanding corrective actions;



**WHEREAS:** Consumers are concerned about MCI WorldCom's long-term commitment to TRS;

**WHEREAS:** There has been intensive discussion among consumers and leaders that has unanimously resulted in the need to express serious concerns to the FCC about the impact of the proposed merger of Sprint and MCI WorldCom on TRS, and to seek the FCC's intervention; and

**WHEREAS:** The FCC has recently taken steps to initiate continued improvement in TRS services.

**THEREFORE:** The NAD, TDI, and the CAN requests that the FCC require that MCI WorldCom and Sprint, as part of their merger proposal, be mandated to present plans to the FCC to ensure high quality TRS and a competitive environment within the TRS industry as a stipulation for FCC approval of the proposed merger; and

**FURTHERMORE:** This coalition asks that prior to approving such merger the FCC review such plans and seek approval of the proposal via a consumer panel consisting of representatives from the organizations represented in this resolution, to ensure that the proposed plan will continue or exceed the level of quality currently provided by Sprint TRS program.

Respectfully submitted by:

Nancy Bloch, Executive Director, NAD  
Claude Stout, Executive Director, TDI  
Alfred Sonnenstrahl, Telecommunications Chair, CAN



# The Relay Ambassador Program (RAP)

Educating people about Relay Texas.



What does the RAP do? This is the primary method of outreach for educating and promoting the use of Relay Texas (RT) among Texans. We continue to believe there are a great number of individuals and businesses who are still unaware of RT and what it does. The RAP is part of our answer as it offers the opportunity to increase RT awareness by sub-contracting with various individuals and organizations throughout the state of Texas, who provide the outreach for us.

Also, we continue to seek ambitious groups/individuals who can get involved by applying for the RAP. For more information, contact Paul Rutowski at paul.rutowski@mail.sprint.com or call via TTY at 1-800-678-6275.

At this time, we are working with 4 sub-contractors. Along with their activities for the last 3 months, they are:

Better Business Bureau  
Consumers Education Foundation. (BBB)

## Congratulations

Congratulations to Gary Smith and the BBB for their contributions to an award winning article "Relay Texas is a Re-Sounding Success" in the Texas Co-Op Magazine. This article, featuring Ralph White, caught the attention of the Austin Mayor's Committee for People with Disabilities and eventually won the Barbara Jordan Journalism Award!

Gary Smith at the BBB has been a RAP contractor for several years, and provides outreach mainly by writing articles in newsletters, newspapers, and magazines and working with television stations to do public service announcements about Relay Texas.

Texas Commission for the Deaf  
and Hard of Hearing (TCDHH)

Their project this year is to develop a new Voice Carry Over (VCO) brochure. Be on the look out for dazzling, sharp and renewed VCO brochures! It is now in the final editing process and will be printed within the next 3 months. Anyone can request free brochures by calling Sprint Relay Customer Service at 1-800-676-3777.

### Deaf Action Center (DAC)

The DAC has been providing individual and group training/education on VCO among elderly citizens who have recently lost their telephone independence due to hearing loss. Thanks to the DAC's efforts, those folks are now able to regain their independence with specialized telephones to make their calls possible. If you need to obtain training on VCO in the Dallas area, contact Esther Kelly at the Deaf Action Center at (214) 521-0407

### San Antonio Independent Living Services (SAILS)

The goal of SAILS this year is to promote Relay Texas by doing presentations at mainstreamed schools and local events. The two most recent events took place at Salado Elementary School and at the Comal County Annual Career Fair. Contact SAILS at (210) 281-1878 if you are in the Greater San Antonio Area for a presentation on Relay Texas.

SKSK

## Call Volumes

FY 91-99

	Total Calls	Average/Month
FY 91	1,210,380	100,865
FY 92	1,898,113	158,176
FY 93	2,535,594	211,609
FY 94	2,984,968	248,935
FY 95	3,579,772	298,314
FY 96	4,025,599	335,467
FY 97	4,297,380	358,112
FY 98	4,488,253	374,021
FY 99	4,625,043	385,420

continued.

Note: Minutes per month total over 1,500,000

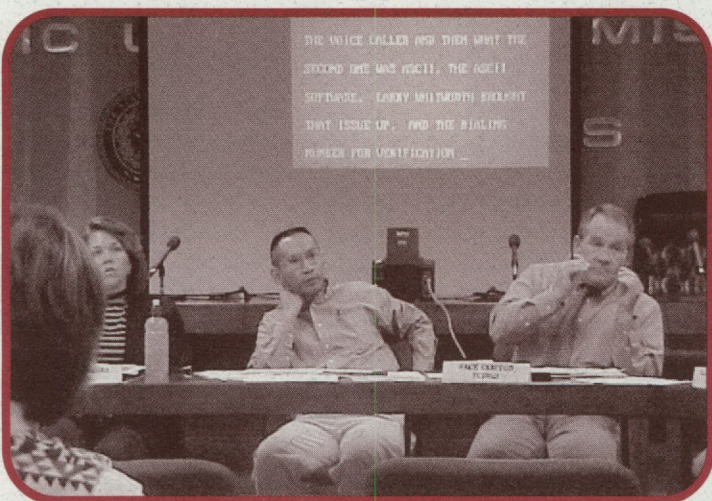


## RT Advisory Committee

Meetings continued. *Continued from page 1.*

Latest News at Print Time

repeat the words of the hearing person into a microphone, which is then converted to text that is sent to the text user (a computer program does that). The advantage of this is that the hearing caller can talk as fast as they wish, and agents do not have to ask them to slow down in order to type. Sprint will report back to the committee after the end of the trial.



### TCDHH Report

There are two new STAP Administrative Technician positions at TCDHH. Having these employees will free Carmen Varela and Yolanda Chavira to educate and recruit applicants. They are working with various agencies to educate and inform potential TCDHH applicants about the STAP. TCDHH is still concerned that not enough people applying for the program. As of November, TCDHH has six STAP training sites. They are in Dallas, Beaumont, Houston, the Panhandle, San Antonio, and McAllen. TCDHH is working with Southwestern Bell to have an insert in phone bills describing the program.

### April Highlights:

The RTAC met on April 14, 2000 at the Brown-Heatly Building in Austin, Texas. The members welcomed new member Kathy Westberry, nominated by the Coalition of Texans with Disabilities.

### PUC Report

The PUC selected the Sprint proposal for relay services for the next five years beginning September 1, 2000. PUC and

Sprint staff begin contract negotiations in May. The PUC filed a Petition for Reconsideration to the FCC asking them to allow funding of interstate relay calls that provide Spanish to English translations.

There are on-going discussions with a modem manufacturer regarding providing free software to computer users to assist them in making calls to Relay Texas using their computer instead of a TTY. Computer calls (ASCII) are much faster and efficient than TTY calls.

### TCDHH Report

The number of applicants to the STAP is down this year. TCDHH cites the \$35 application fee and the seven year limitation as possible reasons for the decline.

TCDHH proposed STAP rules include a definition of "functional equivalence" to mean basic access to the telephone network. Since there are strong opinions on what "basic" means, a sub-committee of the RTAC was formed to research this and submit comments to TCDHH.

### Sprint Report

The Better Business Bureau, a Relay Ambassador Project contractor won the Barbara Jordan award for their article on Relay Texas.

Mark Seeger gave the RTAC members an overview of the recent FCC Report and Order and how it effects relay services.

The next RTAC meeting will be held on Friday, July 21 at 1:00 at the Relay Texas Center.

SKSK

Sandra Murgia, Hector Brual & Jack Clifton, RTAC members shown above.

## EmailAlert



Would you like to be on the e-mail alert list to be notified of issues regarding Relay Texas? Very often we need your input about last minute ideas or changes that may effect Relay Texas. We will send you information regarding RTAC meetings, questions, or comments about something new happening at Relay Texas. If you want to be on this list, send e-mail to: [Relaytx@puc.state.tx.us](mailto:Relaytx@puc.state.tx.us)

State that you want to be on the "Email Alert List".



**PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF TEXAS**

Pat Wood III, Chairman  
 Judy Walsh, Commissioner  
 Brett A. Perlman, Commissioner

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**RELAY TEXAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

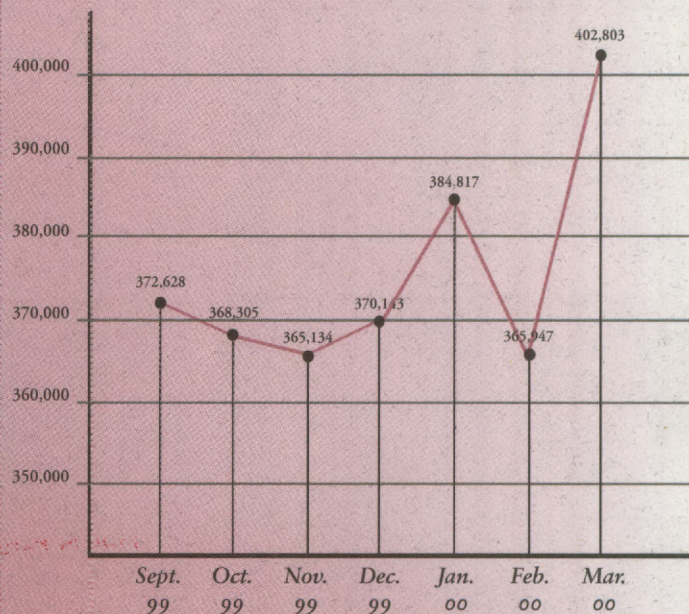
Eileen Alter, Chairperson

Hector Brual (OPUC)	Rona Schnall (CTD)
David Coco (TCDHH)	Kathy Westberry (CTD)
Jack Earwood (TDBA)	James Northcutt (TAD)
Larry Evans (AARP)	Charles Land (TTA)
Herman Harrison (TTA)	Jack Clifton (TCDHH)
Paula Hernandez (SHHH)	Larry Whitworth (TDC)
Sandra Murgia (STAP)	Joseph Acosta (STAP)

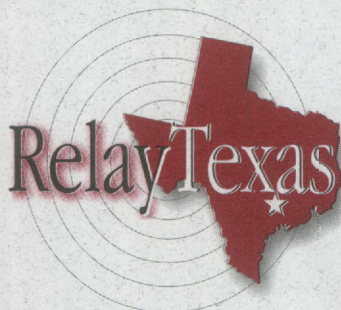
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**RELAY TEXAS CALL VOLUMES**  
 September 99 - March 00



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1 800 735 2989 (TTY)

**1-800 RELAY VV**

1 800 735 2988 (Voice)

**1-800 RELAY XI**

1 800 735 2991 (ASCII)

**1 TRS VCO 1RTX**

1 877 826 1789 (VCO)

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