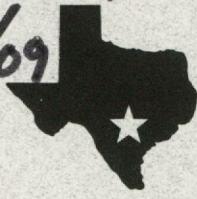


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Relay Texas Newsletter



Government Publications
Texas State Documents

Relay Texas Advisory Committee

SEP 10 1999

May meeting highlights

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The Relay Texas Advisory Committee (RTAC) met at the Deaf Community Center in Austin, Texas on May 15, 1998. There is a new RTAC Evaluation team, comprised of three PUC staff who will be reviewing the committee meetings and reporting to the PUC Commissioners on the effectiveness of the RTAC. State law requires that the committee be reviewed annually to determine if the committee should be abolished.

Sprint to study and track how often this happens and report their findings to the RTAC.

TCDHH has sent out more than 450 vouchers as of this date. There are about 500 in process. Some applications must be sent back due to errors or omitted information. The most common errors include not sending in the \$35 application fee, lack of a certifier's signature, and lack of proof that the person has a telephone.

Highlights of the May meeting:

Sprint received seven proposals for the Relay Ambassador Project (RAP) for fiscal year 1999. PUC and Sprint staff, as well as three RTAC members reviewed the proposals and made their recommendations to the PUC Commissioners. The following bidders were selected and approved for RAP for fiscal year 1999:

- A Sign Language Company*
- The Better Business Bureau*
- Goodwill Industries*
- Deaf Action Center*
- Texas Association of the Deaf*

Motion:



David Coco made a motion asking Sprint to collect and distribute statistics on the frequency of agent changes during a phone call, as well as the number of times an agent of a different gender takes over a relay call. Second by Paula Adams Hernandez. The motion passed.

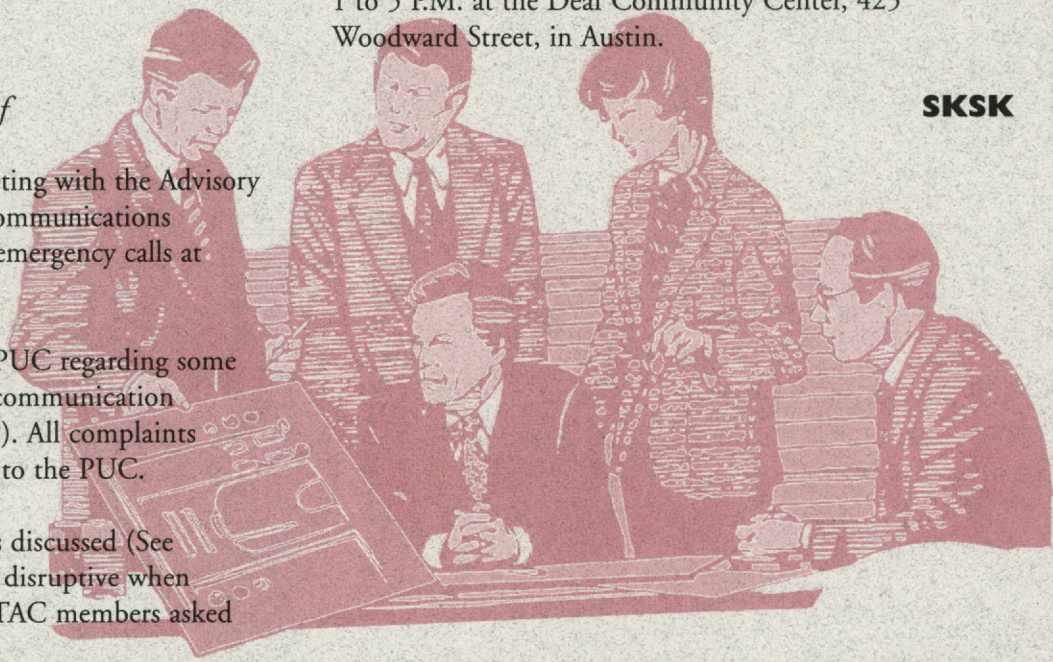
The next RTAC meeting will be Friday, October 2, from 1 to 5 P.M. at the Deaf Community Center, 425 Woodward Street, in Austin.

SKSK

PUC and Sprint staff have been meeting with the Advisory Commission on State Emergency Communications to discuss improved ways to handle emergency calls at Relay Texas.

There have been complaints to the PUC regarding some vendors of the new Specialized Telecommunication Device Assistance Program (STDAP). All complaints should be made in writing and sent to the PUC.

Agent changes during relay calls was discussed (See "motions Made", below). It is often disruptive when agents change during a relay call. RTAC members asked



FUTURE CHANGES IN STORE FOR RELAY SERVICES

FCC proposes ways to improve TRS.



In May 14, 1998, the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) released their Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM) regarding telecommunications relay services (TRS).

The FCC proposes ways to improve TRS and extend services to more people with disabilities and requests comments on their proposals. Among the proposals in the rule making:

The FCC tentatively concluded that the costs of speech-to-speech (STS) services and video relay interpreting (VRI) services should be recoverable from the national TRS fund. The National TRS fund pays for interstate and international relay service costs.

The FCC tentatively concludes that STS services should be a required feature of TRS within two years of adoption of their final rules.

The FCC tentatively concluded that it should strengthen the current TRS minimum standards, including its speed-of-answer rules.

The FCC tentatively concluded that it should amend the TRS enforcement rules to improve oversight of certified state programs.

The rule making proposal also requests comments on a variety of other proposals, which include Spanish translation, how emergency calls are handled at relay centers, and passing customer information to new TRS providers, to name a few. The Public Utility Commission (PUC) submitted the comments to the FCC regarding these issues. To get a copy of the PUC comments to the FCC, call the PUC Central Records Department at 512 936-7176 (V). Ask for Project Number 19561, PUC Comments to the FCC NPRM CC Docket No. 98-67 FCC 98-90. There is a fee of \$.10 per page. (The comments are approximately 100 pages.)

The NPRM is available on the Internet at the FCC site: www.fcc.gov. Go to "Disabilities Issues" and then scroll down to the NPRM. (CC Docket No. 98-67, FCC 98-90). You may also call the FCC for a copy at 202-418-0200 (TTY: 202-418-2555). Comments on the NPRM were due July 20, 1998.

SKSK

FCC CERTIFIES RELAY TEXAS!



Every five years, Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) programs must apply to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to certify their relay service. Without certification, a state may not recover interstate call costs from the federal TRS fund.

When applying for certification, states must submit information and answer many questions about their relay service. On the basis of the Texas application, the FCC determined that:

1. the TRS program of the State of Texas meets or exceeds all operational, technical, and functional minimum standards contained in the FCC rules;
2. the state's program makes available adequate procedures and remedies for enforcing the requirements of the state program; and,
3. the state's program in no way conflicts with federal law.

This certification is effective beginning July 26, 1998 and ending July 25, 2003.



Congratulations to the State of Texas!

SKSK

TRS Historical Perspective

(Second in a four part series.) by Ed Bosson



1960

ast forward to the mid-1960's where there were the "two-ton monsters" (those huge teletypewriter machines that outlived their usefulness, and were donated freely from Western Union and other companies) that were converted to TTYs, so a deaf person could directly call another deaf person with similar equipment. These machines were huge, heavy, and ugly with a gray metallic look, and vibrated with such awful sounds that hearing friends startled, and young hearing children either cried or fled. As eyesores, these machines were often sequestered in a corner of the living room, and even then, attempts were made to complement the colors of the room, or even decorate them with painted flowers, as I did. At that time there were no standalone telephone flashers (a phone flasher flashes so deaf persons know their phone is ringing). These flashers had to be attached to these machines, and living rooms were the only logical place to put them in; they could not be hidden in another room, otherwise one might not see the phone flasher and miss a call. Nevertheless, these machines introduced an important element of independence, so much so that the sight of those ugly and noisy machines in the living room was worth it.

That idiosyncratic pattern of showing up at friend's house uninvited disappeared, because now telephone access made it possible for deaf persons to call and check to see if anyone was at home. The elderly deaf persons

bemoaned the disappearing "tradition" of having dinners with good friends and having an enjoyable discussion about various issues. An adage endures; that is, one generation's mores gives way to the next, due to technological innovations.

Yet, even with the "new" TTY behemoths, hearing-impaired persons still could not call their hearing friends, doctors, or their bosses at their workplaces. There were no relay services then. They still had to go to neighbors or relatives to ask them to make a call to a hearing person. Sometimes it was awkward for deaf persons if they had an intimate ailment and they needed to call the doctor's office. Nurses invariably needed to know what the ailments were before they would even consider making an appointment. In the end, the deaf person had to divulge the details of their ailments with the hearing neighbor in order to make the appointment.

In retrospect, privacy for deaf persons who wanted to call a hearing person was nonexistent. But at the same time, progress was made in the form of telecommunications access between similarly hearing-impaired persons. The third part of this series will explore how access to the telephone network has increased through innovative ideas by the hearing-impaired community.

SKSK

STDAP Update



he Public Utility Commission (PUC) and the Texas Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TCDHH) share responsibilities for the Specialized Telecommunications Device Assistance Program. TCDHH is responsible for establishing the program (equipment and price), processing applications, and distributing vouchers. The PUC is responsible for vendor registration and reimbursement.

The PUC has received some complaints about vendors, mostly via phone calls. We ask that any complaints regarding vendors be sent to the PUC in writing, as written complaints can be formally logged in our database.

TYPES OF COMPLAINTS RECEIVED:

- Vendors urging recipients to buy equipment that costs more than the voucher price.
- Vendors convincing recipients to give back the lower cost voucher to TCDHH and get one for higher priced, more expensive equipment. Sometimes the equipment is not the best suited for the recipient.
- Vendors "requiring" people to sign forms saying they will purchase their equipment from them.

continued on page 4



SUGGESTIONS/INFORMATION:

- If you are unsure of the type of equipment you need, before sending in your application review the possible types and brands with the person certifying your hearing or speech impairment. This person should be a good (and neutral) source of information. You can also check with vendors, catalogs, and your local service provider for assistance.
- It is best not to sign anything promising to buy equipment from a certain vendor.
- Not all vendors have all types of equipment. Some vendors sell only TTYs and VCO phones. Others may only sell amplified phones and VCO phones. Vendors are not required to sell all approved equipment.
- Vendors can offer "rebates" for buying from them.
- When considering where to buy equipment, you may want to ask others where they purchased

similar equipment. Also, you may want to ask about warranties and repairs. (Remember, the equipment is yours, and the PUC or TCDHH are not responsible for equipment if it breaks.) Some people also prefer to buy from a vendor in their area, so they do not have to send the equipment away should repairs be necessary.

- If sending a complaint, we prefer that the situation involves you. Please do not send a complaint that involves a report that someone else heard.

To contact TCDHH: 512 407-3250 (V/TTY)
To contact the PUC: 512 936-7147 (TTY) Ed Bosson
512 936-7148 (V/TTY) Lisa Kriger
STDAP@puc.state.tx.us
You may send vendor complaints to Ed Bosson at:
1701 N. Congress Ave. • PO Box 13326
Austin, Texas 78711-3326
or 512 936-7003 (Fax)

SKSK

STDAP Vendor Issues



As with any new program, the STDAP process will take some getting used to. We believe that once the program is off the ground for several months, everyone will have time to familiarize themselves with the program rules and guidelines and the process will become smoother and more efficient.

The PUC and TCDHH receive reports from the Texas Exchange Carrier Association (TECA; the agency that contracts with the PUC to reimburse vendors) informing us of newly registered vendors, as well as vouchers that are sent back to vendors unpaid. The main reasons for a voucher being returned to vendors are:

- **THERE IS NO RECIPIENT SIGNATURE ON THE VOUCHER.**
If the transaction is mail order, we will accept a postal receipt, a postcard or letter from the recipient with his or her signature.

- **THERE IS NO SALES RECEIPT ATTACHED TO THE VOUCHER.**
Even though the equipment information and price is listed on the front of the voucher, you still need to attach a separate receipt to the voucher. This will be used for audit purposes.
- **THE VENDOR IS NOT REGISTERED.**
Interested vendors may call Lisa Kriger, 512-936-7148 (V/TTY) for a copy of the vendor registration guidelines.
- **THE VENDOR HAS NOT SIGNED THE VOUCHER.**

If you are unsure of any of the vendor procedures, or have questions or comments, you may send an eMail to:

stdap@puc.state.tx.us or you may call Ed Bosson at 512-936-7147 (TTY) or Lisa Kriger at the above number. The PUC fax number is 512-936-7003.

SKSK

Agent Tips

Ideas for making calls more efficient



I asked Relay Texas agents for suggestions to make your relay calls more efficient. Here are some of their comments:

- Remember that the agent is not part of the conversation. They must read everything typed to the hearing person, even the things you type in parenthesis. Also, they are required to type everything they hear to the TTY user, even side comments and background noise.
- The agent is not permitted to make judgments on how a customer feels during a relay call. (For example, "sounds rude, angry, sad", etc.) However, you can ask how "loud" the voice is.
- Please type or press the space bar after you receive the greeting "RELAY TX AGENT XXX NBR PLS GA". If more than 10 seconds passes after they send you this message and do not receive a reply, the agent's computer thinks no one is there and switches to see if it is an ASCII (computer) call. This will delay your call set up. Please have the number you are calling ready for a quicker dial out.
- For ASCII users who receive relay calls: Set up your Customer Database with your "Outbound Answer Type

Branding". This means telling Relay Texas what baud rate (300/1200/2400) should be used when Relay Texas calls you. Sometimes there are disconnections when you get a relay call on your computer. If you set up your Customer Database and advise them which baud rate to use when calling you, it will help solve this problem.

- Up to 10 frequently dialed numbers can be entered in your Customer Database. If you have people that you call often, you can put their name and phone number in the database. Then, when you call Relay Texas, just tell the agent "dial Mom" or "dial Dr. Jones" and they will have the phone number ready.
- Preferred long distance company: Set up your customer database with your preferred long distance company. This way, each time you make a long distance call through Relay Texas, you will not have to tell the agent your long distance information. Note: If you want to use Sprint for in-state long distance calls (50 percent discount) and another company for out-of-state long distance calls, then tell the agent to put this in your "Customer Notes".

NOTE: If you have never set up your Customer Database, please call Sprint Customer Service at 1-800-676-3777 (TTY/V). If you want to add or change information in your database, call the regular Relay Texas number and tell the agent who answers.

SKSK



Beginning October 1, VCO users will have a separate Relay Texas number to call! The number is TRS -VCO-1RTX (877 826-1789). VCO users can now call Relay Texas from anywhere (office, hotel, payphone) and agents will know that the incoming call is a VCO call. Since there have been a number of complaints from VCO users about their branding being "lost", having a number specifically for VCO should eliminate this problem.

We would like to thank the Relay Texas Advisory Committee for coming up with this solution and proposing the idea to Sprint and the Public Utility Commission.

SKSK

FREE PRE-PAID CALLING CARDS!

Do you have an interesting story to tell about Relay Texas, or how relay services have helped you? If your letter is chosen, it will be printed in the Relay Texas Newsletter and you'll get one hour of prepaid long distance calling cards from Sprint.

Send your letter to:

Ed Bosson
1701 N. Congress Ave.
PO Box 13326
Austin, TX 78711-3326
or Fax: 512 936-7003
eMail: relaytx@puc.state.tx.us

Percent of Originated Calls By Device

TTY	ASCII	Voice	VCO
77%	2%	16%	5%

Totals are rounded to the nearest percent. Hearing Carry Over calls are less than .05%.

PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION OF TEXAS

Pat Wood III, Chairman
Judy Walsh, Commissioner
Patricia Curran, Commissioner

PUBLIC UTILITY COMMISSION STAFF

Ed Bosson, Relay Texas Administrator
Lisa Kriger, Relay Texas Assistant
Lane Lanford, Executive Director
(512) 936-7000 (V) (512) 936-7136 (TTY)
1701 Congress Ave., Austin, TX 78711

RELAY TEXAS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Eileen Alter, Chairperson

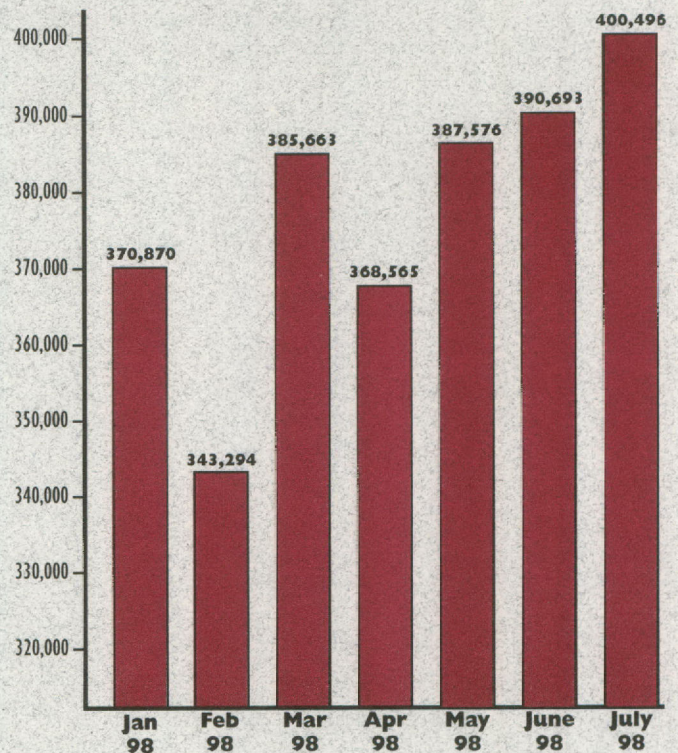
Hector Brual (OPUC)	Vacant (CTD)
David Coco (TCDHH)	Vacant (CTD)
Jack Earwood (TDBA)	James Northcutt (TAD)
Larry Evans (AARP)	Charles Land (TTA)
Herman Harrison (TTA)	Larry Umberger (TCDHH)
Paula Hernandez (SHHH)	Larry Whitworth (TDC)

SPRINT

Paul Rutowski, Account Manager
1 (800) 578-6275 (TTY)

Relay Texas Call Volumes

January 98 to April 98



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Email: relaytx@puc.state.tx.us

I-800 RELAY TX

I 800 735 2989 (TTY)

I 800 RELAY VV

I 800 735 2988 (VOICE)

I 800 RELAY XI

I 800 735 2991 (ASCII)

I 900 320 2303

(To Make a 900 Call)

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