

Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay

**Saturday, March 20, 2004
Greenbelt Community Center
15 Crescent Road
Greenbelt, MD 20770**

GABTR Members: Annette Reichman (Temporary Chair), Cynthia Foss, Paula Holbrook, Rebecca Ladew, Susan Stevens Miller, Louis Schwarz, Jim Stevenson.

GABTR Members Excused: Brenda Battat, Patty Bowman, Mitch Travers

GABTR Members Absent: Joy Larsen, Shawn Lovley

TAM Staff: Patty Bird, Brenda Kelly-Frey, Michael Hollywood, Nancy Seidman, and Pam Stewart

AT&T Staff: Missy Devlin, Joe Kolash, Rochelle Jonson (in place of Patty Ferran)

Interpreters: Anne Acampora; Noreen Hagemeyer, Tona Swaggart

Visitors: George Schroeder, Fred Waldorf, Al Sonnenstrahl, Mary Ann White-Pickering, Gordon Pickering, Erick Fleischer, Barbara Eager, Nancy Shugart, Catherine Holmes

Cart Transcriber: Ann Blazejewski

Annette Reichman called the meeting to order at 1:35 p.m., welcomed the group to the GABTR meeting and reported that Mitch Travers is recuperating from back surgery and had asked her to preside over the meeting.

Board members, TAM staff and AT&T staff introduced themselves to the public.

Mike Hollywood explained that the Minutes of the October 25, 2003 meeting had not been forwarded by the recording secretary, but would be posted on the web site once they were received.

TAM Reports & Questions/Answers

- Mike Hollywood stated that the next Board meeting would be held in northern Maryland at a location to be determined.
- Mike explained the procedures regarding traveling to distant sites for meetings and being reimbursed for travel expenses.
- He also explained that there was currently a vacancy on the Board for a senior citizen member. The Governor's Appointments Office is looking into the matter. Mike reminded members whose term is due to expire that if they wished to remain on the Board, they should write a letter of interest to the Appointments Office. If anyone has questions regarding this, contact Mike, who is the liaison for GABTR, at mike@mdrelay.org.
- Pam Stewart reported on the initial phase of the CapTel trial. She explained that the new CapTel device is similar to VCO except that individuals could use any residual hearing to both see and hear the captioned conversation simultaneously.

- The CapTel equipment will be available on a limited basis because it is not as yet an FCC-required relay product. TAM is currently responsible for all costs involved. At this time, there are 120 users. If the FCC mandates the use of the CapTel equipment, the project will be expanded. Individuals added to the second phase of the trial would be required to either purchase the CapTel or apply to our MAT (Maryland Accessible Telecommunications) program. To receive a CapTel phone, interested persons must apply to the CapTel Program and receive approval. (Invoices for CapTel minutes are paid from the TAM budget.)
- Paula Holbrook asked that because the number of people has decreased, does that mean those other types have decreased? Will there be any changes in the quality?
- In reply, Pam told Paula that Ultratec is increasing the number of operators because other States are also getting CapTel. It is another reason we must expand slowly. Ultratec tells us how many new people we can add per month because if we just gave out unlimited phones, they would not have enough qualified operators to process the calls. Again, it is not a required service by the FCC, so they are not staffed up for thousands of people joining at the same time.
- Pam explained that there are errors both on the part of the operator and on the part of technology. Voice to text is done by recognizing the operator's voice. Sometimes if the voice is not totally clear, the computer hears a word a little differently. For example, one time she was testing the equipment, and someone answered the phone, saying, "The owners of the computer company were Bruce and Fred." She understood 'Bruce and Dead' and asked if they would spell the name. She figured the guy probably thought she was ignorant because she had to ask him to spell 'Fred'. It is that kind of thing. As operators get more experienced, they catch those errors and fix them on the fly, but as we are expanding the program and more and more new operators are hired who aren't used to catching those errors quickly, we run into these difficulties. The operator skills will increase with time, as with any operator.
- Pam acknowledged that there are a few delays being experienced between the time the person on the other end has voiced their comments and the time someone else reads the text. Example: if she would call you, you would pick up the phone, and you might say "Hello." She would hear that. Then you would get the message, "Wait for captions." So as the hearing person, she's waiting, but hearing nothing. She would get a message from CapTel saying, "Wait for just a minute." We are telling people to use those conversation fillers, 'hi', 'just a minute' kinds of things. When she speaks, the system has to switch back. There is usually a three to five second gap. However, if you are getting longer than three to five seconds, please let us know. Again, you get an operator number on this, just like you do with relay. Let us know, and we will follow up to determine if it is a technical problem or if an operator needs more training, just like we do with relay service.
- Pam noted that TAM would suggest to Ultratec that they set up a macro in order that the person receiving the call is able to get the operator's number at the end of the call as well as at the beginning of the call.
- Pam stressed that the error rate on CapTel is extremely low, but is dependent on the computer recognizing the operator's voice, with the understanding the voice can be affected by respiratory illness, if any.

Nancy Seidman reported several accomplishments:

- TAM is conducting outreach to various groups around the State that serve individuals with speech disabilities such as stuttering associated to cerebral palsy, oncologists, plus any group serving those individuals with speech disabilities, with a mailing emphasizing that speech-to-speech relay is available and that TAM was willing to do presentations for them.
- Becky Ladew, a member of our Board, created a very informative website aptly named Beckyspeaks.org, which speaks about her experiences growing up and about speech-to-speech relay.
- TAM just did an outreach to all State agencies by sending a very extensive packet to the directors and CIO's of departments emphasizing accessibility to their deaf customers and/or employees.
- The Relay Partners Program will be promoted by running radio commercials appealing to businesses, asking, "Do you know there are deaf customers out there you can contact by telephone or vice versa?" They will be directed to the TAM website, which will be linked to a new Relay Partner website. It should be up in May.
- The Equipment Distribution Program has been promoted by placing ads with a coupon in local newspapers across the State. Currently, we have ads running in Western Maryland newspapers with coupons for free equipment. We get tremendous response. Our strategy is after beginning with ads in Western Maryland, to do Southern Maryland, then the Eastern Shore. Lastly, we will go to Central Maryland. The reason for that progression is that we feel that the Baltimore-Washington area gets continual information, with the outlying areas receiving the least.
- Our brochures are prepared in Spanish because there is Spanish relay. The Latino deaf community in Maryland might not be a large community, but we will intensify our outreach to the Latino community.
- Outreach to the deaf community is ongoing. We send representatives to different deaf-sponsored events.
- Outreach to the schools is ongoing as well. The educational curriculum is here for you to examine. It is a full curriculum that is designed for the general population to let the hearing students know how to communicate (including making phone calls) with their deaf peers who have been mainstreamed into their schools.
- The Maryland RELAY website is now fully accessible to the visually impaired.

Patty Bird gave the next report for TAM:

- Patty reported on the status of the Maryland Accessible Telecommunications (MAT) program, in place to help people get necessary assistive equipment when they cannot use a standard telephone.
- In the MAT equipment distribution program, outreach, especially with the speech-impaired population, has been improved lately. More and more individuals are calling to seek information about participation in the MAT program. Also, more responses are coming from the visually impaired. Since the last meeting, we have received 177 applications and served 182 people. We have ordered over 250 pieces of equipment. We have received more feedback from advertisements in different parts of the State.

Brenda Kelly-Frey reported that:

- Brenda introduced the new board members: Louis Schwarz, Paula Holbrook, and Cynthia Foss. She stated that her agency is trying to keep up with technology because technology is rapidly changing the scene of relay, and DBM/TAM is responsible for the oversight of traditional relay. Currently the FCC is discussing video relay service and looking at Internet protocol relay, which is not under TAMs purview.
- She mentioned a Homeland Security Summit at the FCC building Thursday (3/25), which is important because communication issues during a disaster or emergency situation will be discussed. Brenda was involved with the FCC in the planning of this Summit.
- On 3/26, Brenda will participate in a Consumer Advisory Commission meeting planning for a forum regarding feedback from the people who use video, the interpreters, the TRS administrators, and all of the parties who are involved in video relay service. One of our recommendations for this Commission is for an extensive national outreach effort and a method by which to pay for a national outreach for relay. The State of Maryland does an extensive amount of outreach, advertising, public relations, and media contact pertaining to relay, unlike many other States that don't have a large budget or the staff. The general public must be educated.

AT&T Session

- Joe Kolash introduced himself as a new outreach manager.
- He described the Module Training Program-- the number of operators is at the maximum of 215. He will be explaining the procedures on training modules, including hard-of-hearing culture in May and Deaf/Blind and speech-impaired disability during the summer. Also, he explained various up-coming outreach activities such as touring Gallaudet University and the Maryland School for the Deaf, planning for the Expo and/or events for individuals with disabilities in various cities, and having booths at various deaf events/conferences for consumer awareness. He will work with TAM to promote the Relay Partner program and asked Board members to visit the Relay Center to observe various activities, including the VCO method.
- Missy Devlin explained the operator maximum and the attrition rate, which has, fortunately, reduced significantly over the past couple of months. Reasons for the attrition rate are many: the individuals were just not suited for the job, and there was no reason to keep them on duty or possibly they just weren't very good relay operators. We have a very strict quality assurance plan in place when hiring. We also have a performance management process whereby all new hires are put through an intensive two-week training period. Everyone completing the training has to type 60 words per minute at a minimum and has to understand all the methods and procedures.
- It always takes new hires a while to become really comfortable with methods and procedures. However, we continue to work with them, coach, develop, take feedback from customer comments, complaints, compliments from users of relay and return this feedback to the new operators. We monitor them very closely, and if we see that they simply are not meeting standards, they are let go. Over the past year we have been hiring pretty regularly up until the last couple of months. Our last class came in about a month ago, so we have leveled out. The attrition rate has dropped significantly. Some people choose to leave on their own. This is a 24/7 center and some operators aren't comfortable

with the hours. If we don't feel there is a good fit, they are removed from the payroll quickly.

- We measure performance by having managers monitor the individuals and providing feedback. There are six resource managers who are responsible for regularly monitoring groups of approximately 30 operators. We also have floor coaches available who are more experienced operators to monitor individuals. We perform typing tests and typing drills periodically and we take them offline for role-playing if it is felt that individuals are having problems with certain types of calls.
- Missy also noted that regarding the call statistics report sent out by Mike Hollywood a few weeks ago for the calls in 2003, it may have appeared that the traditional relay TTY calls for Maryland had been slowly decreasing but that Maryland IP, and AT&T IP calls seemed to be slowly increasing. She thinks it is just a matter of having various ways to place calls these days over and above the traditional relay. IP is very popular and now we have services like CapTel available. Folks also have their pagers, their E-mail, their IM for resources. We do have to watch how the volumes fluctuate to make sure that we have enough people on staff to handle the call volumes.
- Missy also noted that there is a dedicated work force in the Maryland center that handles only Maryland Relay calls, but there are also operators in place to handle the overflow of AT&T calls. Our primary core focus is Maryland Relay and we need to make sure that we have a dedicated work force making certain that calls are answered timely, on a regular basis and that we have enough people on duty at all times of the day, all hours, to focus on Maryland calls
- Pam Stewart said that it was a conscious decision on the part of the State of Maryland to allow other than calls for Maryland to come into the Center because it benefits the State of Maryland. The primary concern in that center is for Maryland Relay calls, but were we to have an unusual spike in calls or an emergency, operators are retrieved from the national side, and they are dedicated to Maryland. That gives us a lot more protection. The center has more people to utilize in bad weather, in emergencies, etc. Therefore, it is a benefit to Maryland Relay. We have more stringent requirements than other relay centers, and other operators are held to Maryland's standards. We have a lot more operators available. Maryland calls are taken handled first. Other calls are sent out if Maryland isn't reaching their answer times.
- Pam addressed a question concerning automated phone systems via the relay service by replying that any time individuals have to type a response rather than signing and/or voicing it, it will take longer. Also, if you frequently make the same automated call, you can type your instructions (press 7, then 5, then 1) to the operator before you begin your call (before you put your phone number in). Your call will immediately go to the called person, without having to go back and forth to you.

GABTR Session

- Jim Stevenson noted that they were fortunate to have Nancy Seidman come to Allegany County to speak with the local Management Board. The local management board represents 33 organizations in Allegany County, including education and health departments, law enforcement, and social services-- basically all the institutions within the organization. Again, sharing information about the Maryland Relay and the equipment distribution program was important. We are looking at this as the first of several presentations for local management boards across the State to share information

about Maryland Relay. We are attempting to ensure that all governmental agencies are aware of the opportunities for Maryland Relay.

- Susan Miller, general counsel with the Public Service Commission, had nothing to report.
- Becky Ladew recalled that in her report last October, she gave four objectives to a proposal that was presented last November by the Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) Working Group, a subcommittee of the Consumer Advisory Committee at the Federal Communications Commission. She participated in the presentation of the proposal because she sits on the Consumer Advisory Committee as the representative of speech-to-speech relay users. The four objectives that were presented before the committee are: determine whether the FCC has authority or jurisdiction to conduct a national outreach campaign on telecommunications relay services; recommend a process and mechanism for the national outreach campaign; determine whether TRS call centers should be designated as key telecommunications facilities to receive top priority restoration in event of a weather disaster or act of terrorism; and, give input to the FCC on the idea of posting a national summit to address homeland security issues for people with disabilities. The proposal was passed unanimously by the full Advisory Committee and has supposedly gone to the Commission for review. It is now up to the TRS Working Group to oversee that the objectives in the above-mentioned proposal put into place and implemented. The Consumer Advisory Committee has a meeting Friday, March 26th. I am sure there will be discussions of what ensued at the meetings during the past year.
- A Homeland Security Summit will be held March 25th, at the Federal Communications Commission. This Summit will address security issues within the realm of the Federal Communications Commission involving people with disabilities, i.e. deaf, deaf/blind, blind, hard of hearing, late deafened, speech disabled, etc. The results of the Summit will go directly to the Federal Communications Commission commissioners
- Louis Schwarz and Cynthia Foss have experienced frustrating problems with the Relay service, including non-standardization of user identifications or extensions. Proposed exploring existing technology to better utilize equipment hearing persons readily use, such as pagers to make Relay calls or using an automated phone system.
- Cynthia reported that CapTel has been an absolute lifesaver for her and she is willing to share her experiences using the equipment.

Public Input

- Mary Ann White Pickering, a teacher in the public school system for the past 14 years, has yet to see any deaf students use a TTY or any other mode of communication. She suggested that Maryland Relay get in touch with school-age, deaf children. Mary Ann also suggested providing some kind of educational training for hearing parents as well as for their deaf children.
- Nancy Seidman responded that the TAM office does a lot of outreach to schools and conferences, such as the Maryland State Steering Committee for teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing annual's conference at Western Maryland College. Those teachers are very familiar with TAMs educational kit, which was designed specifically to educate the hearing students about the needs of the deaf and hard-of-hearing students so that they can communicate with each other. The audiologists, speech pathologists and teachers of the deaf and hard-of-hearing are teaching their students about the use of a TTY and are also using the kits. Most teachers know about this program and about using TTYs. They know about our equipment distribution program to assure that each child who does not have a

TTY can get one. Nancy has already given out approximately 600 of these educational kits across the State, and promises that TAM will continue to do this outreach. If you are in a school that you feel needs one of these kits, please get in touch with Nancy, and she will make sure that they get the kit. (Nancy@MDrelay.org) If you have a specific place you want Nancy to do outreach, please contact her. The kits are available for schools. The TAM office will be happy to work with you.

Many teachers contact Nancy personally. The first step is that teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing in the counties that work closely with those students in the classroom contact us. Secondly, TAM is sending mailings to the different school systems to let them know this kit is available, will be given to the teachers, and is free.

Fred Waldorf had a concern about the White/Yellow Pages in the local phone books. Even though the Maryland Relay is explained on the first pages, his concern is that the public isn't savvy enough to know to look for it there because they don't know about Relay. He has a hard time explaining to people that he can be reached via the relay and suggests placing a TV advertisement such as "what is 7-1-1?".

- Mike Hollywood has taken to sending 7-1-1 business cards which contain explicit instructions for a hearing person to contact a deaf person through relay. Anyone who would like some 7-1-1 cards, contact Mike and he'll get you a supply to distribute. All you need to do is put your name and home phone number on the card. The cards are free.
- Catherine Holmes called the Board of Education in Upper Marlboro one day and couldn't get through, so decided to go in person. She was trying to teach a human resource specialist how to call 7-1-1. The HR specialist called 7-1-1 and said, "Nothing is happening." She kept pushing the buttons. We were struggling and struggling and Catherine was getting frustrated. It seemed like the phone system needed to be upgraded or something because it wasn't working.
- Pam Stewart stressed that 7-1-1 is there and available. The FCC requires 7-1-1 to be available. However, PBXs, the private phone systems that are in many businesses, are privately owned. We, the State and the FCC, cannot require private PBXs to unblock or open three-digit dialing. Often in a PBX system, a phone system will block three digit dialing so that people don't dial wrong numbers. All they have to do is a software change that takes about two minutes that says from this phone system you can dial 8 and then 7-1-1 and it will go out onto the local phone network. The problem is that a lot of businesses block three digit dialing because their employees will dial 4-1-1, which is a charged call. Those calls cost the businesses a lot of money, so they block three-digit dialing.
- Alfred Sonnenstrahl noted that with regard to 7-1-1 and PBX systems, the relay team had sent out information to the different businesses on how to reprogram the PBX into recognizing the 7-1-1, which is included in their system. Apparently not all of them followed that procedure. But he has now noticed that they are starting to reprogram their PBX system to allow the 7-1-1 to get through. You are going to have to ask them to get that done. His second issue was in relation to hearing people making calls. He lives in a deaf house, can't use the phone for voice purposes, and will have to put in caller ID. That is one way to solve the problem

Nancy Seidman reminded everyone that is why we are saying national outreach is so important. If there could be outreach on a national level with lots of money out there, if a commercial could be on national television again and again and again, the word would get out. In Maryland, we are restricted by money. It is all about the money. We are a

State agency. But when talking about large corporate entities like Best Buy, we need the assistance of the national outreach program.

- An audience member noted that Verizon explained how to use the Relay service in their Yellow Pages.
- Nancy Seidman explained that TAM was responsible for placing the ad in the Verizon book. However, when she is talking to a company like Best Buy or BJ's or Sam's Club or any of these companies that are national, the first thing they say to her is, "Well, we are a national company, and have to take that suggestion to national headquarters." And then it drops. State employees don't have the authority to visit national headquarters in other States. We are limited by the State with State funds to stick to businesses that are originating in the State. We must put a lot of the responsibility for outreach on you, the customers. You are the ones who utilize these businesses. You are the ones that get frustrated because businesses don't deal with you. You have to help with education. If you think about the number of people in the State that we are tasked with educating and the turnover at every business, you have to realize that all of you are advocates. We wish there were national advertising. We wish there was a commercial on every day about 7-1-1. But the money is not there. Until the FCC finds a funding mechanism or AT&T, Sprint, and/or MCI decides to invest money in national advertising, you are not going to see the knowledge grow the way we would like it to.
- Gordon Pickering sometimes has difficulty when making phone calls to a public school system, when he normally wishes only to leave a message. One department will always have a TTY and they will have an answering machine. Sometimes if they are busy, though, he can't get through, then has to call the principal's office. The secretary does not accept his calls and says that he has to call via the TTY line. When he tries to explain to the secretary that she can accept the relay service call, she doesn't understand and won't accept the call. There is a constant struggle there in the principal's office. The secretary is not accepting the relay calls. So what is he to do?

An audience member has actually had the same experience several times and had to drive to the principal's office. I have to go through Maryland Relay and 7-1-1 to get there. Then I write a letter of complaint. You have to fight for your rights. You have to educate the public and make them aware of your needs.

- Another audience member suggested that when making a phone call, ask for the other person's name. Document if they won't take the call and contact their supervisor.
- Pam Stewart stated that some GABTR attendees had the opportunity to hear a good presentation that morning by Karen Peltz-Strauss. One of the things that it showed was the struggle for years of getting the ADA written, getting relay set up, the continuing struggles. You have to take the time to find the appropriate party, like Mr. Waldorf and Mr. Sonnenstrahl said, let them know about the relay. In a school system, if necessary, call the superintendent of the schools, give him/her the Maryland Relay contact information to get Maryland Relay to come out to them. But like Nancy said, if they contact us, then their teachers and staff are going to be more open to it. If it comes from you, a parent, they listen a lot better than if it comes from us as a State agency saying, "You have to answer relay calls; you have to accept them." So take the first step and then we will help with the education.
- Annette Reichman stated that the floor was closed and the last thing on the agenda was 'old business'. There was no old business to be discussed.

The question was asked who was the recording secretary. Whether or not it was the CART transcriber.

Mike Hollywood explained that when the CART reporter is finished with the minutes, she gives TAM the disk, who then sends it to one of the Board members to modify, condense and summarize. Does that mean the board has to appoint a secretary to review it? Yes, to review the minutes.

Mitch Travers assumed the responsibility as the secretary at the last meeting.

Louis Schwarz agreed to assume the responsibility of secretary for this meeting.

New Business:

- Louis Schwarz made a motion that TAM explore the issue of standardizing the relay extension number for the deaf telephone users and said that recently there was a regulation related to portability and transferring their phone numbers. He would like to see it standardized all over America so it would benefit all deaf people who are relay customers.
- Brenda Kelly Frey suggested forming a subcommittee to explore standardizing the relay extension number, do the research and prepare a white paper for submission to the National Relay Convention in South Carolina in September. She volunteered to send the materials to NASRA (relay administrator for all relays in the US) prior to the date of the Convention.
- Louis Schwarz made a motion that the Board instruct TAM to market to businesses and firms related to relay partners to modify their database to include the 7-1-1 extension to accommodate deaf relay consumers.
- Nancy Seidman is currently in the process of editing the materials to go on the Relay Partners website and will explore the possibility of suggesting to businesses that they add an extra three fields to the phone number of deaf customers to include 7-1-1. Website updates should be completed by the end of April and Nancy will bring a copy of the marketing materials to the next meeting.

The meeting is adjourned at 3:35 p.m.