

**Minutes of the meeting of the
Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay
Salisbury, Maryland
August 4, 2001**

Board Members in Attendance: Mitch Travers (Chair), Isaac Agboola, Brenda Battat, Susan Boswell, Joy Larson, Susan Stevens Miller, Annette Reichman, Al Sonnenstrahl, Jim Stevenson

Absent Members: Patsy Bowman, Gary Manifold, Rebecca Ladew

TAM Staff: Gilbert Becker, Willis Mann, Maggie Griffiths, Brenda Kelly-Frey

Representative from Sprint: Lennox Hood, Curtis Humphries

Visitors: Andrew Brenneman, Samuel Jones, Francis Langlais, Joanna Langlais, Patty Brennan

Interpreters: Anne Acampora, Denise Perdue, Michele Reichard

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair asked if there were any corrections to the minutes of the previous meeting. The following corrections were made:

- On page 4, in the section: "FCC Advisory Council", replace the words: "the subcommittees have sought" with: "the committee has sought". Also, the statement that the committee has received assurance that its recommendations would be reviewed was incorrect.

The minutes were accepted as corrected.

TAM STAFF REPORTS

Willis Mann

Board Reappointments: Four Board members are currently up for reappointment and they have submitted their requests for reappointment to the Governor's Office. However, it may take up to two months for the Governor's Office to respond.

Mitch Travers noted that a Board member's term does not legally expire until the request for reappointment has been approved or a replacement has been appointed in cases where the Board member does not seek reappointment.

Gil Becker

Quality Survey: The relay quality survey conducted last March provided useful information about where improvements need to be made.

RFP: The RFP was scheduled to be released by late August but it may take a couple of weeks longer than scheduled. TAM appreciates the input by Board members who have reviewed the document.

Outreach Activities: TAM is planning for the next Deaf Awareness Week, which is scheduled for the third week of September. Planned activities include an appearance by the Wild Zappers at the Harbor Place in Baltimore and display of special posters in public libraries. Maryland Relay is also a major sponsor of the upcoming MDAD conference. Copies of the educational kit

prototype were sent to professionals in the Department of Education, Maryland School for the Deaf, and other states for review and feedback. The kits could be ready for general distribution by September. TAM still receives numerous requests to set up exhibits and provide training all over the state. In October, Maryland Relay will resume television advertising. A market survey conducted after the television advertising run of last March indicated an all time high of 30 percent awareness of the relay across the state. As a result of considerable interest in our television advertisements by Virginia residents, among other local jurisdictions, the State of Virginia contributed approximately \$30,000 towards our advertising budget, which would be used to extend the advertising run.

711: Effective October 1st 711 access will be required nationally. Maryland Relay has already introduced the feature a couple of years ago.

STARS Meeting: Gil Becker, Willis Mann, and Pam Stewart attended the recent State Administrators of Relay Services meeting in Austin, Texas.

Questions for Gil Becker:

- Al Sonnenstrahl inquired how soon the proposed technological improvements to Maryland Relay would be implemented. Gil Becker responded that the time line is not yet clear and that some of the platform improvements probably would not be in place for as many as 20 months into the future
- Al Sonnenstrahl inquired whether wireless 711 has been implemented in Maryland. Gil Becker responded that some wireless vendors are already 711 compliant and that TAM is working to ensure that rest would be compliant. He added that special procedures are being developed to identify and process wireless calls.

Brenda Kelly-Frey

Update on the MAT: The MAT program recently completed a mass mailing of about 1,000 MAT applications, brochures, introductory letters, as well as contributed articles to different support groups of people with special needs such as the muscular dystrophy, stroke, and multiple sclerosis. The MAT program also sent information to special education schools throughout the State of Maryland.

Questions for Brenda Kelly-Frey:

- Al Sonnenstrahl noted that the number of people served relative to the potential number of people that could be served by the MAT program still appears to be low. Brenda Kelly-Frey responded that the program has specific income and other requirements and that a specific piece of equipment might be serving many users, such as those who live in group settings.
- In response to an inquiry by Isaac Agboola, Brenda Kelly-Frey said the MAT program normally does not keep equipment in stock, other than those intended for demonstration. Equipment is ordered as needed when applications are approved.
- Joy Larson asked if the program would provide individuals with support service providers (SSP's). Brenda Kelly-Frey responded that the program is limited to telephone equipment access and does not cover service assistance.

SPRINT REPRESENTATIVE'S REPORT

Lennox Hood

Complaints and Commendations: Consumer feedback summaries were distributed to Board members. There were no questions or comments about the document.

Maryland Relay 10 Year Celebration: Sprint plans to host a celebration marking the 10-year anniversary of Maryland Relay on August 22 in Columbia Maryland.

New Board Members: New members of the Board are invited to visit the Relay facilities in Baltimore to familiarize themselves with the operations.

Questions for Lennox Hood:

- Mitch Travers said he has recently observed unusually long response times when he used the relay. He said others have reported similar delays and that the phone would ring as many as 10 times before any operator answers. Several Board members confirmed that they had also noticed a significant increase in the number of rings before pickup in recent times. Lennox Hood responded that he was not aware that the response time has been increasing and suggested that the reported delays could be attributed to a power outage at the Miami center on July 24th and 25th. He added that people noticing unusually long delays could immediately report this to him or other senior Sprint and TAM administrators. Al Sonnenstrahl asked whether the systems would record a call as an abandoned call when a user gives up after the phone has rang many times with no operator pickup. Lennox Hood responded that such calls are also documented as a part of the service level statistics report mandated by the FCC.
- Brenda Battat noted that the majority of outreach activities appear to be targeted at schools. Gilbert Becker said that TAM targets a variety of consumer groups using a variety of outreach methods such as television advertisements, newspaper and magazine advertisements, and participation at community events.
- Isaac Agboola inquired whether operators are trained to advise callers at the onset of a call to a federal agency to use the Federal Relay System instead of Maryland Relay and thus avoid a potential waste of time when making such calls since some federal agencies require that relay calls be made through the Federal Relay System. Lennox Hood noted that operators would not generally be able to determine at the onset that a phone number belongs to a federal agency. Curtis Humphries said operators are not required to provide information to callers about the Federal Relay but that Sprint maintains a list of referrals if people call and requested contact information about specific locations such as the TAM office. Several Board members suggested that Maryland residents should have the right to have their calls to federal agencies processed by Maryland Relay and not be forced to use the Federal Relay System. However, it was noted that certain federal agencies require relay calls to be made only through the Federal Relay System or even through their own special relay services due to security and privacy requirements.

PUBLIC INPUT

Joanna Langlis

Caller ID: Joanna Langlis said not being able to determine that a call is from Maryland Relay is quite inconvenient for her. She requested that the system be improved to show the relay number on caller identification equipment. Mitch Travers responded that the new RFP requires caller identification for TTY users.

Samuel Jones

Access to 711 through PBX: Samuel Jones said he hopes that businesses would be required to reprogram their PBX systems to make it possible to make 711 calls. Gil Becker said the PBX issue is a national one and that he has requested that the topic be put on the agenda for an upcoming FCC planning forum.

VRS: Samuel Jones said he had used the VRS during the trial period and that he liked it and found it much faster than regular relay. He said he would like VRS to be offered on a permanent basis.

MEMBERS' ACTIVITY REPORTS

Annette Reichman

Additional Call Center: Annette Reichman said the ongoing RFP process provides an opportunity to address certain concerns about the relay and suggested that an additional call center should be established somewhere else in the state. Isaac Agboola requested more specifics about what concerns prompted the need for an additional call center and where the new center should be located. Annette Reichman responded that establishing an additional center close to a major university would provide a labor pool of better educated operators at relatively cheaper labor costs. She noted that the law mandated that the call center be located in Baltimore but that it is not clear if that precludes establishing an additional center elsewhere in the state.

Brenda Battat

Committee Activities Update: Brenda Battat said the next meeting of the FCC Advisory Council was scheduled for August 6th and that the proposed issues include the definition of functional equivalency, reimbursement, Internet relay, and wireless technology. She is also a member of an AT&T consumer advisory council.

Susan Boswell

Using Hyperterminal for relay calls: Susan Boswell reported that she regularly use Hyperterminal to make relay calls. Hyperterminal is a communication software that usually comes free with Windows 95 and Windows 98. She said she had no problem with the software until recently when she noticed that the software would not display what she was typing on the screen during a relay call. However, the communication assistant could see both sides of the conversation. The problem was caused by a bug in the version of Hyperterminal program that comes with Windows 98 and a patch that takes care of the problem is available at the website of the company that makes the software. Mitch Travers said more sophisticated communication software than Hyperterminal is available, including one that provides a split screen and enables the user to interrupt the operator without garbling the conversation. Al Sonnestrahl noted that

integrating the relay with the Internet might open the system up to new problems such as viruses and worms.

Al Sonnenstrahl

Board Participation in RFP Review: Al Sonnenstrahl said the Board should normally play a major role in the RFP process but that so far, our participation has been fragmented, with input to TAM done more on a one-to-one basis by individual Board members. To correct this, he suggested that the Board should meet in an executive session in which the RFP would be the sole agenda item. Mitch Travers said a group of four Board members had recently met to review the RFP and they provided feedback to TAM after the review.

Information Sharing with the Board: Al Sonnenstrahl observed that TAM's recent report to the FCC was not shared with the Board and that similar lack of information makes it difficult for the Board to get a good picture of important relay statistics such as call volume relative to other states. There is also a need to evaluate the cost effectiveness of relay outreach efforts. He requested that TAM provide the board with call volume trend and average minute per call statistics for the past five years before the next Board meeting so we could compare those with similar statistics of other states. Gil Becker responded that trend statistics for Maryland Relay for the past five years is available but that comparable statistics for other states would be difficult to obtain since some of them do not normally keep reliable and comprehensive statistics. Gil Becker repeated his statement that feedback indicated that outreach efforts has been effective and that, for instance, the 30 percent level of relay awareness in Maryland is probably among the highest in the nation.

Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing: Al Sonnenstrahl suggested that there should be a representative on the GABTR from the proposed Maryland Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing. A quick poll of the Board was taken about this. Some board members supported the idea; some expressed concern about increasing the size of the Board; and it was suggested that representatives of certain groups and constituencies could be invited to specific Board meetings as necessary instead of permanent membership.

Publicizing Board meetings locally: Al Sonnenstrahl said he was surprised to learn that the local deaf community appeared to have been completely unaware that a GABTR meeting was going to be held in their area until a day or so before the meeting. Gil Becker responded that the advertising contract includes a requirement to send out notices well in advance to the local communities where a meeting would be held, and that the TAM office also sends out advance notice of meetings to people on its mailing list who live in the local community. Al Sonnenstrahl suggested that deaf media outlets would be more effective in reaching the deaf community.

Mitch Travers

Maryland Relay Website: Mitch Travers said that he has had his hands full lately but that he would continue helping to improve the Maryland Relay Web site. One of the proposed improvements is an online form that consumers could use to provide public input.

Two-Line VCO: Mitch Travers suggested that there should be a separate number for two-line

VCO, too, so that it is as convenient as one-line VCO.

RFP: Mitch Travers reported that in talking to various constituent groups recently to obtain feedback that could possibly be incorporated into the current RFP, it appears that deaf consumers are generally satisfied with the relay because it was sometimes difficult to get feedback from them, and when they do provide feedback, their comments were generally limited to basic issues such as slow response times.

Jim Stevenson

E-Card Demonstration: Jim Stevenson demonstrated a device called an e-card that could be used to store data and small applications such as presentations. He suggested that Sprint or TAM could investigate how such cards could be used as promotional tools for the relay. One such way is to create e-cards containing information about the relay for distribution to the general public. He invited TAM and Sprint to participate in an upcoming joint project between Allegany and St. Mary counties, which would involve children in grades six through eight, to create educational packets that could be distributed through e-card technology.

OLD BUSINESS (*None*)

NEW BUSINESS (*None*)

The meeting adjourned at 11:50 a.m.