

**Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay
Fourth Annual Meeting
Saturday, November 10, 2001
2001 West Preston Street, Baltimore**

ATTENDEES

Board Members: Mitch Travers (Chair), Isaac Agboola, Brenda Battat, Susan Boswell, Patsy Bowman, Joy Larson, Gary Manifold, Susan Stevens Miller, Annette Reichman, Al Sonnenstrahl, Jim Stevenson. Excused: Rebecca Ladew

TAM Staff: Gilbert Becker, Patty Bird, Brenda Kelly-Frey, Willis Mann, Nancy Seidman, Pam Stewart

DBM Staff: Preston Dillard

Visitors: Don Boone (AT&T), Billy Bowman, Paula Holbrook (Sprint), Lennox Hood (Sprint), Curtis Humphries (Sprint), Robert Mather (MDAD), Randy Murbarch (Sprint), Teresa Murbach, Karen Sheffer-Tucker (CSD), Lee Smith (MDAD), Kim Wabschall (MCI), Stephen Weiner (MDAD)

Captioner: Natalie Prunty

MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were accepted as read.

TAM REPORTS

Willis Mann

New Administrative Specialist: Patty Bird has replaced Sue Holiway as administrative specialist at TAM.

Budget Cut: At a meeting of the TAM staff the previous day (November 9th), it was announced that as a result of a state-wide budget cut ordered by the Governor, there would be a 30% cut in discretionary funds, which is expected to impact travel, training, as well as the GABTR. The number of GABTR meeting would be reduced from four to three during the 2002 calendar year. In response to an inquiry from Al Sonnenstrahl, Willis Mann said the GABTR is not required to hold a specific number of meetings within a calendar year.

Pam Stewart

New RFP: The RFP is expected to be released within two weeks. Al Sonnenstrahl asked if any changes were made to the RFP since the last RFP review by the GABTR and if so,

whether the GABTR should review the final version of the RFP before release. Pam Stewart responded that there were no changes to the content. Al Sonnenstrahl inquired whether the RFP release could be delayed until the multivendoring issue could be discussed and subsequently addressed in the RFP. Gil Becker responded that the multivendoring issue is too complicated to be resolved in the time remaining before the RFP is schedule to be released. The schedule for the release was set in order to ensure continuous relay service and any further delay could result in a lapse in service.

Nancy Seidman

Educational Kit: The educational kit is still being pilot tested and revised, with the active participation of Sprint. The kit includes a poster titled “People who are deaf are just like you and me”, units on the five senses, information about deafness and deaf culture, an ASL videotape called “Sign me a Story”, and a videotape designed to teach young children how to use the relay. Brenda Battat noted that SHHH is starting junior chapters and that the educational kit would be a useful resource for them.

Recent Outreach Efforts: Recent outreach efforts include television commercials featuring 7-1-1 and VCO, mass mailings of relay feature-specific brochures, and the MAT program. The commercials and other outreach efforts such as mass mailings have generated a steady stream of inquiries and TAM is responding to the requests coming in for additional information about the relay.

Questions for Nancy Seidman: Al Sonnenstrahl noted that his household still receives many voice calls and suggested that TAM could direct some of their advertising at educating the public to recognize TTY tones and what to do when they get such tones.

Brenda Kelly-Frey

MAT Program Update: The MAT program has received a total of 1,269 applications to date and has distributed about 2,200 pieces of equipment throughout the state. Recent outreach efforts have resulted in increased applications. A report showing how many applications were approved or rejected, grouped by county, was distributed.

SPRINT REPRESENTATIVES REPORTS

Lennox Hood

Complaints Report: Copies of a report showing complaint tallies for the months of July through September 2001 were distributed. Also distributed were copies of a report showing Sprint’s outreach efforts in the state for the period July through September 2001. GABTR Board members, especially the new members, are encouraged to visit the relay center.

Sprint Community Event: On August 22, Sprint hosted a community event to mark 10 years of relay partnership in Maryland and to recognize the relay operators. There were over 300 people in attendance, including GABTR board members and over 30 operators. Dr. Victor Galloway was the emcee and Ken Glickman entertained the audience.

GABTR MEMBERS REPORTS

Susan Boswell

Two-line VCO Calls: Currently, consumers who want to make two-line VCO calls must have the proper equipment for making conference calls. The relay should consider making this unnecessary by providing a feature that would enable the operator set up conference calling on the operator side. California's RFP has included this feature, which would also be useful for making other types of calls such as speech-to-speech.

Community Feedback: Hard of hearing users of the relay have complained that some operators speak too fast and then resisted slowing down when asked. Some operators also insist on asking the deaf users to retype a message before repeating the message to the hard of hearing caller when requested to do so, which slows things down considerably.

7-1-1 Calls: Sometimes, Virginia Relay answered 7-1-1 calls placed within Maryland when the user intended to use Maryland Relay. This problem should be investigated.

Brenda Battat

7-1-1 Calls: Deaf and hard of hearing people are being misinformed by some relay operators when they use 7-1-1 that that number is for hearing callers only.

Caller-ID: Consumers want to be able to know through caller identification that a call is from Maryland Relay.

Hearing Relay Users: Many hearing relay users consider the relay to be too slow and susceptible to mistakes that too often require the hearing caller to repeat what is said.

FCC: The FCC Advisory Council is having its next meeting on November 30th. Brenda Battat and Gil Becker serve on the Disability Subcommittee.

Jim Stevenson

Grants Supported Projects: Allegany and St. Mary counties are operating a project funded by a federal grant, which includes a program involving virtual field trips by students throughout the year. The program is also interested in integrating the educational kits being developed by TAM. There will be a year-end event in Cumberland.

Traveling Exhibit: The GABTR should consider holding one of its year 2002 meetings in conjunction with a traveling social history exhibit of deaf Americans, a project supported in part by Gallaudet University. The exhibit consists of about 60 panels covering 2,500 square feet.

Al Sonnenstrahl

Paying for Two-line VCO: In reference to Susan Boswell's earlier comments regarding two-line VCO, TDI and several national organizations have written comments to the FCC asking that two-line VCO be included among the items covered by the universal service

fee. The coalition has also suggested that the universal service fee should cover the development of a more affordable telecommunications product for deaf and blind individuals than Telebraille, which, at around \$6,000 each, is too expensive.

7-1-1 Access: The PBX systems at many hotels are still not equipped to handle 7-1-1 calls, so efforts should be made to encourage hotels to reprogram their PBX. On a related matter, a consumer complained that a 7-1-1 call from a cell phone at a Maryland location was not billed to AT&T as that cell phone was programmed to be billed, and that the call was processed by Sprint's National Relay Service, not Maryland Relay. The consumer has filed a complaint with the FCC.

TAM's Absence from Sprint 10th Anniversary: There were no TAM staff members at the recent Sprint's 10th anniversary celebration. Willis Mann responded that TAM was absent because the RFP was being developed at the time and regulations prohibit TAM from accepting invitations to such events from companies who are expected to bid on the RFP.

Long Distance Carriers: Only about 27 of roughly 200 long distance carriers operating in Maryland have made their services accessible to Maryland relay users. To encourage greater participation by the long distance carriers, the Maryland Public Service Commission should consider decertifying those carriers who are not making their services available to deaf Maryland users. Susan Miller responded that there are actually close to 400 long distance carriers who have requested permission to operate in Maryland, although not necessarily immediately, and that all successful applicants are required to make arrangements with the Maryland relay provider in order to be accessible to Maryland Relay users. She said that if a company fails to do so, the PSC can revoke their licenses, but each case needs to be given due process and that could take time. Randy Murbach said that Sprint has contacted about 300 companies that offer long distance service in Maryland, of which about 6 have responded. Five of those six that responded have since become carriers of choice for the Maryland Relay.

Patsy Bowman

Departments Survey: Thirteen state departments and agencies were recently surveyed to know, among other things, how many of them provide TTYs. Some departments did not answer that question and they will be receiving a follow-up on that issue.

Training on Deaf Awareness: In conjunction with TAM, trainings on deaf awareness and using the relay are being provided to employees of various state departments and agencies.

MULTIVENDORING DISCUSSIONS

Annette Reichman chaired the discussion on multivendoring. After introductory remarks by Stephen Weiner, president of the MDAD, Robert Mather made a presentation highlighting the benefits of multivendoring and Mitch Travers made a presentation highlighting issues that need to be resolved before multivendoring could be successfully implemented in Maryland.

Both Stephen Weiner and Robert Mather emphasized that multivendoring is primarily about consumer choice and fostering healthy competition, which promotes innovation and responsiveness to consumer needs, among other benefits. Highlights of Stephen Weiner and Robert Mather's presentation:

- Deaf Maryland Relay users desire consumer choice in relay services
- Multivendoring can be successfully implemented in Maryland
- Multivendoring will promote relay quality and improve responsiveness to consumers needs
- Multivendoring will promote competition as mandated by the Federal Telecommunications Act of 1996 which will result in innovation in the relay service
- Existing Maryland procurement law, state financial and procurement section 13-205(A) (1) (1995 & Supplement 1999) require the State to procure products and services in a cost-effective manner while, at the same time, allowing for the maximum practicable competition from vendors.
- Options to be considered:
 - Extend the current contract for one year while a thorough study is performed, with a view to developing standards and requirements for multivendoring and then issuing a new RFP that include multivendoring;
 - Following the study, provide draft specifications for multivendoring and obtain public input on those specifications before incorporating them into the RFP;
 - Include multivendoring now, in the new RFP that is currently being developed;
 - Maintain the status quo: single vendor.

Mitch Travers emphasized that his arguments were not directed against multivendoring *per se*, but to draw attention to critical issues that need to be properly addressed and resolved before multivendoring could become a realistic option in Maryland. Highlights of Mitch Traver's presentation:

- Allow adequate time to perform a comprehensive feasibility study that would address, among other things, cost feasibility, technical feasibility, and operational feasibility;
- Existing state laws have already specified that Maryland Relay must be cost effective and provide quality service which is comparable to those available to people without hearing disabilities;
- Competition may not necessarily lead to increased quality;
- There might not be sufficient critical mass in the marketplace for multivendoring to be realistic in Maryland at this time;
- In general, the benefits of multivendoring need to be weighed against the costs and logistics of regulating and policing multiple vendors.

Following these presentations, GABTR members and other people from the audience participated in the discussions of the pros and cons of multivendoring. The California model and its failure were also discussed in detailed and it was agreed that we would

learn from the California implementation in order to avoid repeating their mistakes. It was eventually agreed in principle to study the issue in details with a view to developing thorough understanding of the implications of multivendoring and a realistic time line for possible future implementation.

The discussions resulted in a decision by the Board to establish an ad-hoc task force on multivendoring, to include representatives from various consumer groups including the MDAD, SHHH, deaf and blind consumers, and representatives from selected state agencies. It was pointed out that the task force might become too large to be effective, so it was suggested that a small core group should coordinate the study and seek input from the various constituencies.

Motion: Al Sonnenstrahl moved that the GABTR should formally request that TAM should not issue a contract of longer than three years (with two one year renewal options), by which time a study of multivendoring might be completed and ready to be considered for possible incorporation into a new RFP. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.