

Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay (GABTR)  
Minutes of November 9, 2002 Meeting  
Maryland School for the Deaf  
Columbia, Maryland

Present: Mitch Travers, Chair; Isaac Agboola; Patricia Bowman; James Stevenson; Marie Campbell; Joy Larson; Susan Boswell; Brenda Battat; Annette Reichman

Excused: Rebecca Ladew; Susan Stevens Miller

TAM Staff: Brenda Kelly-Frey; Willis Mann; Pam Stewart; Nancy Seidman; Michael Hollywood; Patty Bird

Visitors: David Birnbaum, Mike Graziano, Harry Larson, Missy Devlin (AT&T), Patty Ferran (AT&T), Elke Pieters (AT&T).

Chair Mitch Travers called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m. The first order of business was to review the list of meeting dates and locations for calendar year 2003 that was prepared by Willis Mann. The dates/locations proposed were:

February 22	Cambridge
June 7	Hagerstown
October 25	Lexington Park

Following a brief discussion, the dates and locations were approved.

## BOARD DISCUSSIONS

### CapTel Trial

Mr. Travers explained that the agenda for this meeting differed from that of previous meetings. Reports of GABTR members would be heard first, followed by the TAM reports, AT&T reports, public input, old business and finally new business.

There followed a general discussion of the CapTel Trial being conducted in Maryland by Ultratec. Mr. Travers asked for a show of hands for those people who used CapTel and four GABTR members indicated they used it. A number of issues were raised, including general satisfaction with the service, and the length of the lag time. It was noted that the lag time is anywhere from 3 to 5 seconds and this creates the problem of having to ask the person they are speaking with to repeat. It was also noted that when CapTel is busy and they have to use the regular relay VCO, the experience is not always satisfactory. One other problem noted in the CapTel Trial was the difficulty in retrieving messages from answering machines. It was pointed out that often, too many words are missing and this necessitates having to use another service, such as IP Relay, to assure full retrieval of the message.

It was mentioned that you can ask the recipients of calls via CapTel how the system is working for them and whether they are having any problems with it, and that the responses so far using this approach have been positive. Mr. Travers recounted that his initial experience with CapTel was very positive, but that the service quality had deteriorated as the number of users increased. He stated that when he uses the service

now, 50 percent of the time it is good and the lag time is tolerable, but the other 50 percent of the time it is unacceptable. Also there are times when half of a sentence is missing and the lag time will cause the connection to be lost or the operator would say that what they were receiving was unclear. This results in a good deal of frustration at times.

Mr. Agboola stated that any evaluation of the CapTel Trial must include feedback from all users of the service, to which Mr. Travers agreed. He pointed out that this was the reason TAM was extending the trial to determine more precisely how effective the service could be and to attempt to correct any problems that have been uncovered so far in the trial.

### Video Relay Services

There followed a general discussion of VRS services and IP Relay. Ms. Larson pointed out that deaf/blind people often have to rely on others, especially their deaf peers, to understand what they are receiving via TTY. She noted that there was great potential for the deaf/blind to benefit from VRS technology and that Maryland needed to push to incorporate VRS services into their program.

### Operator Involvement in Relay Calls

There was some discussion on the subject of operator involvement in relay calls. Some felt that the operator's message, "One moment please. And I will relay complete message" was an intrusion by the operator and should be changed. The operator should be more invisible. Pam Stewart remarked that this was exactly the kind of feedback that TAM and AT&T want to have so that all the changes that make Maryland Relay more user-friendly and efficient can be incorporated.

### Relay Users Focus Groups

Following a discussion of VCO concerns, Patty Ferran of AT&T took the floor and stated that from January through April, AT&T would be hosting a series of focus groups that would focus on specific topics each month, such as VCO, TTY Relay, HCO&STS, etc. These sessions would be held the 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of each month in the Maryland Relay Center and Ms. Ferran encouraged the GABTR and the public to attend and offer ideas and guidance to help TAM and AT&T fine tune Maryland Relay to meet the needs of Maryland citizens in the most effective way possible.

### Multi-Vendoring Committee

Mr. Travers stated that there had been 3 volunteers who committed to serve on the ad hoc Multi-Vendoring Committee last year. In addition to Mr. Travers, these were Isaac Agboola, Annette Reichman, and Susan Boswell. Mr. Travers inquired if there were any additional people who wanted to be on the committee. Brenda Battat agreed to serve on the committee. There followed a discussion of the mandate from last year's meeting and what it would entail. Mr. Travers outlined the discussion from the November 10, 2001 meeting and stated that consumer choice (Multi-Vendoring) was of immense interest, and also stated that he hoped the state would be able to hire a consultant to work with the committee. A plan of action and statement of work would

need to be drawn up for the consultant to follow in determining how multi-vendoring would be implemented in Maryland.

Ms. Reichman stated that in view of the changes that had already taken place in the relay industry (e.g., VRS, IP Relay, etc.) that the committee's focus would be somewhat different from what was envisioned a year ago. Mr. Agboola stated that because of the changes mentioned by Ms. Reichman, multi-vendoring was already more or less a *fait accompli* in Maryland since many companies were already offering nationwide service. Ms. Battat said she was wondering how multi-vendoring would be implemented in view of the State's existing contract with AT&T. Mr. Travers stated that it was not so much a question of implementing it in the existing contract as it was the State availing itself of opportunities to implement multi-vendoring concepts during the next contract cycle, which is why the research on how it will be done and what structure it will have is necessary for the committee to explore at this time.

In the ensuing discussion, it was pointed out that with multi-vendoring, it was not only a consumer choice issue in terms of who you want as your relay provider but also what kind of relay you like to use, whether it be VCO, VRS, TTY relay, or whatever. It has to be kept in mind, however, that some providers may only be providing one type of relay service rather than a whole spectrum of services and it's important to provide as wide a series of choices as possible. Mr. Travers also stated that the MDAD was actively monitoring the situation to see what recommendations on multi-vendoring the ad hoc committee might make to the State, therefore, it behooves the committee to undertake its work carefully and thoroughly.

#### Public Relations Initiatives with Allegany County

Following a brief recess, Mr. Stevenson stated that he would like to invite TAM staff to come to Allegany County to make a presentation to the Local Management Board (LMB) on Maryland Relay. The LMB is made up of 33 members representing law enforcement, the health department, social services, libraries and churches. Mr. Stevenson specifically requested a presentation on relay services that would be of particular benefit to senior citizens. He stated there was a great deal of dis-information about access to the telephone system for maintaining family ties. Mr. Stevenson said there was also a state-wide LMB and he would like to see TAM make presentations to that group also.

Additionally, Mr. Stevenson shared information about a CD developed by 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders in Allegany County that could be useful to the TAM staff in producing similar CD's. He said he would share a copy of the CD with the TAM staff for their perusal.

#### TAM STAFF REPORTS

##### Willis Mann

Next on the agenda was the TAM report, which was made by Willis Mann. He stated that Becky Ladew's mother had recently passed away at the age of 97, and that at the request of Mr. Travers, he had ordered flowers on behalf of the GABTR to be sent to Becky's home.

Mr. Mann informed the GABTR members that the Maryland Relay traffic reports he had sent out should be ignored as they contained erroneous information and would be completely redone, hopefully in time for the next meeting.

Mr. Mann advised the GABTR members that he had a stack of reimbursement forms with him and that any member of the GABTR who needed some should see him after the meeting.

Mr. Mann pointed out that one of the things GABTR has never undertaken is the development of a set of by-laws for itself. He stated that he would be contacting the Governor's Office of Appointments to request the names of advisory boards similar to the GABTR and then contact those groups to determine whether or not they operated under by-laws and if so, to obtain copies of same from them.

Mr. Mann stated that he had several boxes of business cards with the new relay voice number on them and that he would provide each member of the GABTR a supply of the cards for their use. These cards have the procedures for using Maryland Relay to contact someone, and can be pasted to the back of a regular business card.

### Pam Stewart

The report of the TAM contract administrator, Pam Stewart, was then read by Mr. Mann. Ms. Stewart stated that TAM is continuing to monitor the performance of AT&T in the provision of Maryland Relay to ensure that all issues are addressed in an appropriate manner. TAM has also been working with them to fine-tune the reporting system that they submit each month so that the information provided is the most appropriate to assist us in monitoring the relay.

Ms. Stewart's report also stated that she, Mike Hollywood, and Willis Mann had participated in an historic conference call of Maryland Relay's Conference Calling service and that it was a fascinating experience. It was very touching to see a deaf person have the ability to interrupt a relay conversation, just like hearing people can interrupt on a voice conference call.

Ms. Stewart's report requested that the GABTR provide TAM and AT&T with feedback on the MRCP (Multiple Relay Choice Profile), the new relay choice profiles intended for households with multiple relay users. These would be passed out and TAM would like the GABTR to evaluate these as to ease of use, clarity, and what kinds of problems were encountered in filling out the forms.

Ms. Stewart's report concluded with a summary of the CapTel Trial, stating that the reports TAM had received indicated that people were very satisfied with the service. Comments had been positive, usage had gone up, and that the cap of 200 participants had been reached and no additional applications for participation would be accepted.

In response to a question from Ms. Boswell regarding the extension of the CapTel Trial, Brenda Kelly-Frey stated that she would be making a request to the Board of Public Works on December 4<sup>th</sup> for permission to extend the trial an additional 6 months until June 5<sup>th</sup>. TAM is still involved in discussions with AT&T to determine if they are interested in providing CapTel services or not. It would require a contract modification to do this, and it will take time to examine all the ramifications involved.

Mr. Travers asked what the trend was in each of the major types of relay services. Ms. Stewart stated that since before the transition to AT&T, there had been a steady downward trend in the number of calls to standard TRS. The largest number of users are

those using TTY's for relay calls, with late-deafened persons making up the second largest group. Ms. Stewart, in response to a question, stated that she believes the decline is due partly to national availability of choice in the types of relay. Also email, IM, and pagers have all had an impact in this decline in numbers.

Several members of the Board indicated they would like to see charts indicating the trends for each type of service so they can better grasp the impact of new technologies on conventional relay. Ms. Stewart stated that she would be working with Mr. Mann to develop new types of charts with that information in them.

Mr. Mann, in response to a question related to the MRCP form, stated that in contrast to the regular Relay Choice Profile for individuals, the MRCP was intended for households that had more than one relay user. This form would allow for establishment of a log-in and password procedure as a means of identifying each different user so that their profile could be called up by the operator when they make calls.

Mr. Travers asked why he continued to be asked who his long distance carrier was and when he inquired as to why, he was informed that operators have to ask for that information if the caller has not filed a profile with Maryland Relay. This was specifically contained in our RFP because, with the previous provider, people were complaining they had a long distance carrier but since they had not filed a profile with Maryland Relay, their calls were being billed to Sprint. Mr. Travers stated this information should be posted on the web so people would understand why they were asked who their long distance carrier was.

#### Brenda Kelly Frey

Brenda Kelly-Frey was asked to make her report and she began by bringing greetings from Gil Becker to the GABTR. Ms. Kelly-Frey stated that she is still responsible for the MAT program but that Patty Bird was being trained to take over the program, but will also remain as receptionist.

The MAT program has received 1,550 applications for equipment since 1996, but there are others that were denied for various reasons. Approximately 2,500 pieces of equipment have been distributed. Some people have received up to 5 pieces of equipment, depending on their needs. Every person who were in the MAT "Pending" file received letters last summer asking if they were still interested in receiving equipment and advising them on what kinds of information was still needed to complete the application process. A good response from that mailing was received and some applications are once again active.

The TAM program submitted its application for re-certification to the FCC on October 1, as required. This application filled an entire binder and was a good historical overview of Maryland Relay from inception of the program in 1989 to the present. This took a lot of time for the TAM staff to prepare, and we also sent them binders and boxes with some of the giveaways we give out, plus copies of Relay Partner materials and Students-to-Students information.

Ms. Kelly-Frey stated that, with regard to traffic reports, Maryland Relay was processing from 200,000 to 210,000 calls per month but that figure has continued to steadily decline as new options such as VRS and IP Relay became available to Maryland residents. In response to a question as to whether money not spent on traditional relay could be shunted to cover the cost of CapTel on a permanent basis, Ms. Kelly-Frey stated

that would be one of the justifications being presented to the Board of Public Works. She cautioned, however, that these savings could be offset somewhat by the longer length of CapTel calls compared with traditional relay.

Ms. Battat asked if the TAM program was capturing all the statistics for relay traffic, including CapTel and IP Relay. Ms. Kelly-Frey pointed out that we could only capture traffic for Maryland Relay itself, not for the national IP relay providers since we don't have access to those figures. We keep track of regular TTY relay calls, 2LVCO, VCO, ASCII, etc.

Ms. Kelly-Frey said the idea of by-laws was just something she was thinking about and the GABTR did not have to act on it if they did not wish to. It was pointed out that other boards have general operating procedures rather than by-laws. She also stated that the original language establishing the GABTR was now on the web page for anyone to read.

#### Nancy Seidman

Nancy Seidman was called on to give her Public Relations report. She first thanked everyone for their help with the Open House and stated the event was very successful. Ms. Seidman also reported on the new RFP that was being sent out on the 12<sup>th</sup> to select an advertising agency. She recounted that the existing agency, Devaney & Associates, had been contracted for though Sprint and we wanted to give other agencies an opportunity to bid on this contract as well.

Ms. Seidman elaborated on the awareness surveys that had been conducted in April and September to gauge the public's awareness of and understanding of Maryland Relay. She stated that many more people are aware of Maryland Relay. They either know the name "Relay" and are not sure what it is, or they know what the relay is but are not aware it is called Maryland Relay. The TAM program is also focusing on making 711 known in the community on par with 911 and to do this, 2 new television commercials are being developed beginning in December. Bids have gone out and we expect them to be on TV in the first quarter of next year. TAM will need volunteers to take part in filming these commercials, not now, but later in the year and Ms. Seidman said we need all kinds of relay users who may be interested in performing in these commercials to volunteer.

Ms. Seidman stated that in addition to the commercials, TAM is producing brand new print advertising for newspapers to supplement the commercials. We have also placed print ads in Hispanic newspapers in Montgomery and Baltimore Counties, as well as other locations in Maryland. Ms. Seidman has been working with the Hispanic liaison in the Baltimore City Office on Aging and this individual will be assisting in getting the word out about Maryland Relay. She also stated we are continuing to run ads in all senior publications across the state that emphasize the equipment distribution program and Maryland Relay.

Ms. Seidman related that the TAM office is developing MAT-specific advertising for the first time and this will be aimed at the western counties of Washington, Allegany, and Garrett. This advertising will be carried out in December and we are definitely looking forward to increasing the numbers of people served by the MAT program in those areas.

In addition to the above, Ms. Seidman stated that TAM is developing new phone stickers, white boards, magnets and writing pads that prominently feature our new voice relay number, 1-800-201-7165, rather than the previous 1-800-735-2258 number. Also, the new number is being inserted in all new phone directories in the state, including the yellow page books. One phone directory that used to be called the One Book is now called the Yellow Book and they are producing 17 separate editions of this book state-wide and these books were also supposed to have the new Maryland Relay voice number in them. However, Ms. Seidman received her copy recently and noted the new number had not been inserted, so TAM will probably get a monetary compensation for this error since the books are printed only once a year.

Ms. Seidman related that directory assistance has always been a thorn in her side because she would call and ask the number for Maryland Relay and end up with several different numbers. She will continue working with the phone companies and operator assistance to make sure they know the correct information.

The TAM office is in the process of revising our brochures and probably will develop a sticker to go on the back for now because we still have 10,000 brochures and it would be foolish to trash all of them. Ms. Seidman also stated that she is continuing to promote her educational kit for schools and the response to that has been very good. She has give out over 450 kits so far to different schools and more teachers are asking for them because this is a fully developed curriculum that the teachers can simply put to work without having to develop anything themselves. The State Department of Education featured this kit in their booth during the teachers association convention in Ocean City. Private schools have also expressed interest in the kit and it was exhibited at the independent schools conference.

Ms. Seidman stated that she is continuing with the revision of the web site in cooperation with our webmaster. Various pieces of the architecture are already available and just need to be put together.

Ms. Seidman introduced Elke Pieters, the public relations account manager for AT&T at the Maryland Relay Center. Ms. Seidman was thrilled to have Elke on board and is looking forward to working with her on a variety of public relations projects. She also introduced Mike Hollywood, TAM's administrative assistant, who does some of the PR presentations along with Elke and Willis. Mike has been a welcome addition to the team and has been learning about making presentations to businesses.

The last item in Ms. Seidman's report was that we are going to be doing a massive mailing to state agencies in January to re-acquaint them with Maryland Relay and how to use it. She stated that we did this previously, but that turnover in state agencies made it necessary to do it again because many of the new people had no idea what Maryland Relay was or how to use it. These mailings will include letters, phone stickers, magnets, etc., and will also contain an invitation for them to invite TAM staff to provide training to their people.

#### AT&T REPRESENTATIVES REPORT

Patty Ferran

Ms. Patty Ferran was called on to make the AT&T report. Ms. Ferran stated that AT&T had approximately 130 operators on the payroll, although they have hired many more than that but for one reason or another, some of these people have not been able to or interested enough in providing the services they were hired for so they are let go. Some realize the hours are difficult to handle or they want to go back to school, or have other reasons for leaving. However, AT&T is continuing to hire and train new operators and expects to be doing that for several more years at least until they have a pool of people they feel are highly qualified, motivated and will stay on the job. Ms. Ferran stated that with this workforce, 95 percent of Maryland Relay calls are now handled through the Baltimore center.

In response to a question from Mr. Agboola, Ms. Ferran stated that they recruit operators by going to job fairs, putting ads on the Internet, word of mouth, newspapers, and the Maryland Relay website has a link for this. She stated they hope to have about 140 trained operators on the staff which is why they are continuing to aggressively recruit. AT&T is interested in making sure their operators are able to meet the 60 wpm contractual requirement, and right now, they are averaging 63wpm, including error rates.

Ms. Ferran reiterated that community groups are welcome to use the Maryland Relay Center conference room for meetings and other events. All that is necessary to reserve the room is to call or email them and ask for a reservation. If the room has already been reserved, requestors will be so advised.

Ms. Ferran stated that sometime in the first quarter of 2003, the Maryland Relay Center would have its own in-house customer care center, as required in the contract. This center will be devoted exclusively to handling calls and concerns from Maryland Relay users, rather than having them go through AT&T's national customer care center. This program is in development right now and once the program is ready, announcements will be made about it.

Ms. Ferran next took up the subject of Internet Protocol Relay (IP Relay). She stated that they are continuing to improve the system based on the feedback received from the community members who use it. They are concentrating on a problem right now called "tunneling," which causes the PC to freeze or make the operator appear to be very, very slow. This problem is caused by a firewall and they have just installed a "fix" for the problem. She invited people who use IP Relay to let them know if they continue to experience problems of this nature. She also stated they are working on developing a split screen format for their IP Relay in response to numerous requests.

Ms. Ferran went on to discuss the Carrier of Choice (COC) issue and stated that if someone asks for their long distance calls to be billed to a COC who is not on the AT&T platform, they will be advised of that fact and asked if they would like to use AT&T as the carrier at its lowest rate or best price. AT&T is working to recruit more phone companies into their COC list and this will allow callers more options.

In regard to the focus groups she had mentioned earlier, Ms. Ferran said that the first group would meet on January 23 in the Center and the topic of the first session would be VCO. Both relay users and recipients of relay calls are invited to attend these focus groups to provide a balance view of both ends of the conversations and how they feel about the system. She encouraged GABTR members and visitors to spread the word about these meetings so that the largest number of people possible would be aware of

them and plan to attend. Other dates selected were February 27<sup>th</sup> (TTY users); March 27<sup>th</sup> (IP Relay) and April 24<sup>th</sup> (HCO & STS).

In response to a question from Ms. Boswell regarding a report after the focus groups have met, Ms. Ferran stated that this was a joint effort between AT&T and TAM and that the results of these meetings would be shared with the public. Ms. Stewart added that in addition to reports, the focus groups were a mechanism to provide interaction between AT&T, TAM and the relay users. Continuing feedback from diverse groups will be very beneficial in the long run, as well as giving control of the relay back to relay users.

There followed a general discussion of GABTR's role in the community and how they can generate feedback from their constituent groups. Ms. Kelly-Frey stated that she was personally disappointed with the number of visitors who attend GABTR meetings because TAM and AT&T consider their input to be very valuable to the operation of Maryland Relay. She stated that the feedback given by GABTR would have additional value when supplemented by that from visitors and that TAM and AT&T really needed GABTR's assistance in getting more people to attend these meetings. Ms. Kelly-Frey went on to state that we would welcome people who want to vent in person to TAM and AT&T on their concerns about Maryland Relay. One suggestion that was made was to target meetings to coincide with major events so that people could attend both back to back.

Ms. Ferran continued her report by stating that compared with other states, the Maryland GABTR was very active, knowledgeable, and involved.

Ms. Ferran said she wanted to discuss the Maryland Relay conference calling system and make a clarification. She stated that while it was technically possible for 2 people to be participants in a conference call, it was not recommended. There should be at least 4 people involved, not counting the CART person. AT&T would like GABTR members to participate in testing the conference call system so that they could be assured it works smoothly. She invited GABTR members to let her know when they would like to make a test call. Ms. Ferran stated that she would send out information to GABTR on how to use the conference call system as she had forgotten to bring handouts. She stated that the system was available now and people could use it if they had the necessary equipment, such as Hyperterminal 6.3, or the new software AT&T is working on.

Ms. Ferran stated that she had instructions for people to set up the MRCP and that these could be sent out to anyone who asks, to which Pam Stewart concurred and elaborated that TAM was checking into allowing people to have MRCP's for home and work.

Ms. Battat suggested that since AT&T was basically starting up a whole new center at Maryland Relay with all new people that they should consider bringing in experienced operators from some of their other centers to help train the new people. Missy Devlin responded that AT&T had already done that but could not keep them for long as they were needed at their centers to handle calls. Ms. Battat also suggested that operators should attend different consumer events to familiarize themselves with the consumer population. Ms. Ferran responded by pointing out that the contract required operators to participate in one event per year. She had taken some operators to Deaf Way II and they were absolutely amazed at the communication going on, especially with deaf/blind individuals.

Mr. Travers inquired whether AT&T would make available a browser-based solution for downloading so a separate terminal or program would not be necessary. Ms. Ferran replied that she could not answer that question now but they are letting the technical people work on it and tweak the system to make sure everything functions as it should. Ms. Boswell added that she had had problems using the hyperterminal and was concerned about that and whether conference calling would be compatible with different types of software and web-based solutions. Ms. Ferran responded that right now they are working with hyperterminals and would later expand it. One reason for working with hyperterminal was that it was free and people would not have to pay for software. Mr. Travers stressed that this was not the regular hyperterminal that comes with Windows 2000 or Windows XP. This is a private edition of hyperterminal and may have different protocols. Ms. Devlin suggested they try it the way it is set up now and let them know if there are any problems.

Mr. Graziano asked if conference calling could be used with IP Relay. Ms. Ferran stated that right now it was not possible but that once the system is tested, it may be expanded and might include IP Relay.

#### NEW BUSINESS & ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Travers asked if there was any new business or any announcements. Since there was none, the meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.