

# **Governor's Advisory Board for Telecommunications Relay**

**Saturday, June 19, 2004  
Abingdon Public Library  
2510 Tollgate Road  
Abingdon, MD 21009**

**GABTR Members:** Mitch Travers (Chair), Patty Bowman, Joy Larsen, Louis Schwarz, Jim Stevenson.

**GABTR Members Excused:** Cynthia Foss, Paula Holbrook, Rebecca Ladew, Susan Stevens Miller

**GABTR Members Absent:** Brenda Battat, Shawn Lovely

**TAM Staff:** Brenda Kelly-Frey, Michael Hollywood, Nancy Seidman, Pam Stewart

**AT&T Staff:** Missy Devlin, Patty Ferran, Rochelle Jonson

**Interpreters:** Tony Barraza, Noreen Hagemeyer, Tona Swaggart

**Visitors:** Thelma Breighner, Charles Curry, Benjamin Dubin, Rachel Dubin, Mike Gantz, Donald Hart

**Cart Transcriber:** (unobtainable)

## **Opening Remarks:**

Mitch Travers called the meeting to order and welcomed the group to the GABTR meeting. Mitch noted that there were five Board members present. The next meeting will be October 23<sup>rd</sup>, probably on the Eastern Shore. He noted that dates for the two upcoming meetings needed to be discussed and ratified in order to assure a quorum at those meetings.

Meeting Minutes from the last meeting could not be voted upon since there was not a quorum at this meeting.

Louis Schwarz has been appointed Secretary of GABTR and graciously accepted the position.

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

## **Tam Reports & Questions/Answers**

- Mike Hollywood explained that he is the GABTR liaison person whose role is to provide anything necessary and to assure that meetings run smoothly. He thanked the members and visitors for attending today's meeting.
- Mike noted that they were attempting to secure a location in the St. Michael's area on the Eastern Shore for the October 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting and encouraged members to continue voicing their concerns as well as those of the community at large in order to pave the way for Relay services to be improved.
- Mike also thanked Louis Schwarz for his diligence in taking the Minutes of the previous meeting.
- He also reminded members who are still interested in touring the Relay Center that it's a great way to learn more about the workings of the relay system. There will be another tour in September for any folks who are interested.
- Mike stated that he has in the past, and will continue to email the Board new information from the Federal Communication Commission (FCC) concerning the Relay service.
- Mike reminded members to continue giving him expense reports at the end of Board meetings (or they may be mailed to him). Please see him during breaks or after the meeting should there be any questions.
- Mitch Travers encouraged folks who have not participated in the Relay Center tour to try to make the September tour and see the VCO and Internet Protocol relay demonstration.
- Mitch noted that, with the assistance of the TAM office, he submits responses to the FCC regarding regulatory changes.
- Pam Stewart, the contract administrator for the AT&T contract and the CAPTEL contract, talked a bit about her role. She explained that TAM requires that AT&T have continual training and said that they provide a fantastic customer service at the Relay center. Pam noted that the customer service team developed at the MD Relay center has been recognized nationally for consistently going above and beyond. She provided examples.
- On the CAPTEL contract, Pam stated they are slowly increasing the amount of CAPTEL users. One of the problems is that before a CAPTEL phone is provided to someone, the client has to fill out the MAT application which TAM processes --based on our guidelines -- or, we have to approve that client to buy a CAPTEL phone themselves. The reason for this is that we pay for every minute of usage so it's

necessary to increase this program at a controlled rate. We have about 140 units out right now.

- Pam reported that since the original trial is completed, they would now start the second extended trial with a new CAPTEL version. Some former users were allowed to get an upgraded device and there are quite a few applications in process so these numbers will grow. We keep track of phone users via unique user ID – currently 122 phones are used. There are more CAPTEL users in Maryland, because they are federal employees who obtained CAPTEL directly from the Federal program.
- If you have any problems with the CAPTEL, please convey those issues to the CAPTEL Customer Service at 1.800.482.2424 or 1.888.262.7477, so we can monitor their actions and continue improving your expectations.
- Pam was asked to explain how CAPTEL differs from the Relay service. She explained how the CAPTEL (captioned telephone) works. It is very similar to VCO but one must use the specially designed telephone where you can simultaneously hear the party you are speaking with and see the captions on the telephone screen and can talk directly to the other party. One does not need the TTY device to utilize this. One minor problem is that the captions come in 3-5 second delay. Also, with CAPTEL, you can interrupt which you are not able to do with VCO. Pam said the CAPTEL is not right for everyone.
- When asked how many people have dropped off the trial, Pam replied that approximately 50 users on the first trial did not return their original CAPTEL phones to be upgraded and were cut out of the second phase. (The old ones did not have 9-1-1 capability and numerous other features.) Of those individuals in the previous trial who wish to join the extended trial, they now have to apply like all other new persons do.
- Ultimately, the responsibility for retrieving the equipment is with the CAPTEL manufacturer, Ultratec. If those people apply again we will ask if they still have a piece of equipment. That phone is not operable any more because the code to reach the CAPTEL in those phones is no longer functional.
- Pam was asked if a person could purchase a CAPTEL phone on the open market. She stated that CAPTEL phones are sold exclusively by Ultratec and Potomac Technology through TAM because TAM has to pay for each minute of use. We have a limited budget because this is not a recognized feature of a minimum requirement of the Relay system and is not mandated by the FCC.
- Mitch noted that with a regular relay, TTY, VCO, Internet, you make the call to the operator, the operator will request whether you want to make another call after you are done with the first call. Now with CAPTEL, just like if you were a hearing person, and if you want to make another call, you have to actually hang up, pick it up, and redial. That's how it is with CAPTEL--when you are done, the operator is gone.

- Pam explained that one of the reasons that a lot of late deafened people like CAPTEL is because it is just like using the phone the way they used to do-- you don't dial a relay number; you dial the number of the person you want to call. The phone itself calls and gets the captioning service on the phone and then out dials the number you are calling. You don't have to remember any other number - you dial directly to the person. Thus, you have to disconnect to make the next call.
- People cannot dial a 3-digit number such as “4-1-1”.
- CAPTEL is still in the process of developing the feature whereby people can call you on the second line (to the second jack on back of CAPTEL) so that every call that comes to you will automatically provide call-captioning service on that second line.
- Louis Schwarz advised that he had been a user of CAPTEL until he started using video relay and video relay with VCO and noticed that video relay is much better than CAPTEL for the simple reason of the time delay and the captioning. Through video relay, when I'm talking on the phone, the interpreter is fast and interprets the response and stops at the right time and I can interrupt at the right time. With CAPTEL, I want to interrupt but it's usually five to ten seconds' delay and it's kind of confusing.
- Depending on individual choice, there are currently various options to explore.

Nancy Seidman's Report:

- We put our commercial on television -- on WBAL (channel 11 in Baltimore) --for one month and on WJZ-TV, Channel 13, for a month. We got coverage during the Preakness and the Belmont Stakes, with our first paid-for commercial. We re-launched our Relay Partner program in an appeal to the business community. A Relay Partner concept was designed to reduce the number of hang ups from businesses by communicating to businesses how to accept and make relay calls and in return, we will promote their business on a website as a relay partner. This Relay Partner concept appeared in the Baltimore Warfield's Business Journal. We have continued to tweak our website with this information and currently have approximately 150-170 Relay Partners. On the site, we are revising the employer guide training materials to encourage businesses to add ten extra spaces to their data base field where they enter their customers' phone number. By adding 800 725 2258 or 7-1-1 to their data base field preceding their customer's phone number they will be able to call their customers via the Relay. Also, we will be adding an audio comprised of TTY tones and fax tones in the training (in order that businesses can learn to distinguish between the two sounds).
- We're also scheduling Maryland Relay Nights at the Minor League Ballparks – Frederick, Delmarva and Bowie.

- We are doing some interesting kinds of outreach. We've had our brochures translated into Spanish and are having our website front page redesigned somewhat to include a section for Spanish-speaking individuals.
- Joe Kolash from AT&T has met with the Maryland Library Association. We are working with the Chamber of Commerce to educate businesses about Relay. We've been focusing on resource fairs for families with members with special needs. We have ads placed in senior resource guides throughout the State. We've done outreach to caregivers for the speech disabled, and sport groups.
- Nancy referred Mr. Ben Dubin, who had an employment question relating to his deaf daughter, to the Office of Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Maryland State government and to Ms. Patsy Bowman, who is a representative of that office. She also stated that TAM is reaching out to the hotel industry, but also encouraged everyone present to become an advocate since it is impossible for the TAM office to reach everyone.
- Nancy then introduced Mr. Donald Hart, a VCO user who lives in Towson and thanked him for his tireless efforts as an advocate talking about the Maryland Relay at senior centers.

Brenda Kelly-Frey's Report:

- Brenda handed out a MAT report since Patty Bird was absent from the meeting, showing they've received 59 applications since the last Board meeting. Of those, 14 have been approved; 14 are pending. 25 have been denied due to lack of information. To date (since the last Board meeting), 101 pieces have been distributed and 62 individuals have been served during those few months.
- Brenda was asked if CAPTEL was a part of the MAT program. Yes, 11 CAPTEL phones have been given to persons meeting financial eligibility for CAPTEL. CAPTEL is expensive and requires the same criteria as other equipment.
- Mr. Schwarz noted that on the monthly reports of relay calls, the numbers vary regularly and asked how can they get better statistics based on average numbers every month or year. Brenda stated that the report was from meeting to meeting and agreed that the report could be done in percentages. Mitch suggested an on-going summary from month to month, which would showcase differences.
- Brenda Kelly-Frey said that TAM has an on-going partnership with the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (DORS) which works hand-in-hand with the equipment program. Brenda reported that she would be glad to provide either an annual or a quarterly report to the Board giving a breakdown of equipment handed out.
- Brenda detailed some of the recent accomplishments made in the IT field which have enriched the lives of the hard-of-hearing and deaf community: Relay, VCO, HCO CAPTEL, VRS, Speech to Speech Relay, and Internet Relay.

- A card was passed around for Rebecca Ladew, who was injured last week in Maine.
- Brenda suggested that members (and guests) check the FCC website frequently since proposed legislation for the Telecommunications Relay Services (TRS) Nationwide should be released next week (week of June 21). She urged her constituents to read carefully and if they perceive any problems, to voice them. Any questions, please call the TAM office for explanations. There is an electronic comment filing system on the FCC website. Please make sure you put in the correct docket number of the order that is on the front page of the order so that your comments get assigned to the proper order.
- Brenda will be attending the NASRA (relay administrators) and TEDPA (equipment distribution program administrators) conferences in Charlestown, SC in September.
- Brenda suggested that Donald Hart speak with Pam Stewart after the meeting to discuss CAPTEL in order that Donald be able to promulgate the benefits of CAPTEL during his speaking tours.
- July 24 is the Bowie Bay Sox baseball game and August 7<sup>th</sup> there is a game scheduled on the Eastern Shore at the Delmarva Shorebirds Stadium. More information is on the website as well as in the newsletter being provided today.
- Brenda noted that she has given presentations recently on Homeland Security and Emergency Preparation as they relate to communications. She stressed to the group the necessity of holding onto their TTY equipment that would be necessary to use during an emergency/power outage. Brenda urged constituents to always keep the TTY equipment plugged in so that the batteries are charged.
- Regarding Mr. Schwarz's inquiry about the Verizon insert of about six months ago concerning MCI being the sole internet relay vendor, Brenda called the Verizon representative who didn't realize that there were other Internet relay suppliers. Verizon should not have chosen one company to whom to give approximately \$1m worth of free advertising. She was assured that it would be corrected. Again it happened—six months later. Since she has spoken twice now with the Verizon rep, she hopes this situation will be alleviated.
- The FCC requires providing information regarding Relay via annual inserts by the telephone companies.
- Two years ago, a Maryland bill was introduced and passed to provide a telephone reading service for blind individuals the funding for which comes from the Universal Service funds that pay for relay. We've been working with the National Federation of the Blind (NFB) and the reading service under the MD Dept. of Education to come up with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). GABTR is to have oversight of that program. I will be providing you updates.

The group took a break.

Patty Ferran/AT&T Report:

- Patty just returned from maternity leave and brought a picture of her new baby to share with the group after the meeting.
- At the AT&T Center, they're processing about 95% Maryland calls, which remains constant. There is on-going performance testing for accuracy, spelling, intonation, etc.
- Pam Stewart has been diligently working with us on customer service at the Center. We currently have a deaf training module, as well as a hard-of-hearing, deaf/blind and speech disabled modules in order to assist the operators have a better understanding of their customers. Patty gave examples of training exercises.
- She noted that they currently have approximately 160 operators. AT&T does not provide CAPTEL service.
- All operators are required to attend one outreach event per year that lets them interact with their customers. About 120 operators have met their requirement to date and have seemed to not only learn a lot, but really enjoyed the experience.
- Patty explained about Internet relay fraud. TAM, the Maryland Relay, and other Relay competitors have worked with the FCC to alleviate this situation. Many of the fraudulent calls have come from Nigeria and other parts of Africa and businesses stand to lose tremendous amounts of money and MD Relay and Internet Relay providers are all working hard to block these calls. (Pam Stewart said that many of these calls originate from a region with only one server or one address that will send thousands and thousands of calls. When that happens, if after checking, that address is from overseas, those calls are investigated. Actually this has to be done by the providers, who then share their information with the FCC and the State. The State has no jurisdiction over video relay and internet relay. Operators cannot block the calls. They place all calls and make no judgment whatsoever on a call.
- Patty discussed new features from a trial in Virginia that will be included in the State of Maryland, such as call forwarding, text messaging. She also discussed emergency routing to other AT&T Centers during a crises and disaster recovery plans.
- Mitch suggested the TAM office approach various carriers to try to work out disaster recovery operations if such situations arise. He also brought up customer complaints and resolutions that used to be discussed at Board meetings in order to ascertain trends/patterns so we are better prepared when it's either contract renewal time or when a new RFP is necessary. We need to keep track of what features are or are not

available to us through AT&T, which services work and which don't, which are required and which optional. We need to be aware of strengths and weaknesses.

- Mitch is currently watching various FCC directives, including those for VRS, which will appear on their website which he will send to you with footnotes in order that you're able to focus on important points.
- Mitch also mentioned Governor appointments and reappointments to the GABTR board. Attendance lists of Board meetings are sent to the Governor's office annually.
- Brenda Battat should be removed from the Board. Another representative of seniors should be appointed. Mitch asked Mr. Hart if he might be interested in serving on the Board. Mr. Hart replied that he'd already sent a letter to the Governor's office with a copy to Mitch's office and has had no reply. Some members appear to receive replies and others do not. The law says that a member should continue to serve (even when they wish to resign) until a new appointment has been made.
- Jim shared information about 7-1-1 access via a graph taken off of the Federal 7-1-1 website.

#### Patsy Bowman's Report:

- Thanked supporters of the May Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Event—over 500 people attended.
- ODHH is attending an event at the Baltimore Convention Center June 25, 26, 27<sup>th</sup>. Call ODHH office for information.
- Patsy's busy working on the Annual Report for ODHH>
- Louis stated that in all of his investigation of relay providers, he had almost decided to get rid of his home phone that is only used approximately twice a month. But, it's necessary to hold onto it, for the purpose of using 9-1-1. There should be some way to dial 9-1-1 through the Video and Internet Relay Services. Maybe the FCC needs to be made aware of this.
- There ensued a lengthy discussion about links on the website. Our site only has Internet relay links; it doesn't have VRS links. It was discussed that in order to utilize Sorenson, one must have VP100 to connect to make a Sorenson call. It can be reached through a web can-through Envision software.
- It was noted that cell phone users currently don't pay the universal service fee, which funds the Maryland Relay.
- Might the services for the deaf/blind community be improved? That community can prepare profiles requesting the speed for operators to type.
- Louis suggested that Nancy Seidman contact restaurant trade associations to explain about accepting relay calls.

- Dr. Peck (Penn State) will make a presentation on accessibility at ISTI.
- Jim Stevenson suggested that the TAM staff attend a four-day session in November in Emmitsburg, sponsored by FEMA, after which one is designated a certified crisis planner. Cost is \$85 per day for food and lodging.
- Dr. Bona of DORS passed away on June 6<sup>th</sup> and will be buried in Nigeria.

Rebecca Ladew's Report:

- Rebecca has attended two "Solution Summits" on disability access issues with Homeland Security and Internet-Protocol based communications services at the FCC since the March meeting.