



NEWS

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NEW OPTIONS PROPOSED FOR PAYPHONE CALLS USING RELAY SERVICES

Washington, D.C. – The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has proposed rules to ensure that individuals can use telecommunications relay services (TRS) to make calls from payphones. Specifically, the FCC has proposed new rules to enable a TRS user to pay no more than a person making a non-TRS call would pay with respect to these calls. TRS is a telephone transmission service designed to give persons with hearing or speech disabilities “functionally equivalent” access to the telephone network.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requires common carriers to provide individuals who have hearing or speech disabilities with telephone services that are functionally equivalent to those available to individuals without such disabilities. More specifically, the ADA requires the Commission to establish functional requirements, guidelines, and operational procedures for TRS, and to establish minimum standards for telephone carriers’ provision of TRS.

In its *First Report and Order on TRS*, the Commission required TRS providers to handle “any type of call normally provided by common carriers,” and included coin sent-paid calls (calls made with coins from a standard coin-operated public payphone) in this requirement. Subsequent concerns about the technical difficulties associated with handling coin sent-paid calls through TRS centers, however, resulted in multiple suspensions of the mandate for TRS providers to handle these types calls. Today’s *Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (Notice)* attempts to address these concerns and make the full range of payphone services available to TRS users.

In the *Notice* released today, the Commission is proposing that telephone carriers:

1. not charge TRS users for making relay calls that would otherwise be local from payphones;
2. enable TRS users to use calling cards, collect or third party billing for toll calls from payphones and not charge more than the lower of the coin sent-paid rate or the rate for the calling card, collect or third-party billing; and,
3. conduct extensive consumer education programs to educate TRS users about their payphone calling options.

TRS uses dedicated equipment and staff (Communications Assistants or CAs) that relay conversations between persons using text telephones (TTYs) and persons who use conventional telephones. To access TRS, a TTY user dials the telephone number of the local TRS center. For a TRS user, this first step – the inbound call to the TRS center – is functionally equivalent to receiving a “dial tone.” The caller then gives the number of the party he or she wants to call to the CA. The CA in turn places an outbound voice call to the called party. The CA serves as the “link” in the conversation, converting all TTY messages from the caller into voice messages, and all voice messages from the called party into typed messages for the TTY user. The process is performed in reverse when a voice telephone user initiates the call.

Other types of relay services use trained CAs to relay conversations for people with speech disabilities (speech-to-speech relay), and CAs who know sign language to relay conversations for sign language users (video relay services.)

Action by the Commission March 13, 2001, by Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 01-89). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Ness, Furchtgott-Roth, and Tristani

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