



NEWS

Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, S.W.
Washington, D. C. 20554

News Media Information 202 / 418-0500
Internet: <http://www.fcc.gov>
TTY: 1-888-835-5322

This is an unofficial announcement of Commission action. Release of the full text of a Commission order constitutes official action.
See MCI v. FCC, 515 F 2d 385 (D.C. Circ 1974).

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News Media contact:
Rosemary Kimball (202) 418-0511 voice
(202) 418-1169 TTY
e-mail: rkimball@fcc.gov

TELECOMMUNICATIONS RELAY SERVICES RULES MODIFIED; COMMENTS SOUGHT ON EMERGING TECHNOLOGY, PUBLIC OUTREACH CAMPAIGN AND NATIONAL SECURITY STATUS OF TRS

The Commission has taken another step in a series of initiatives to afford persons with disabilities better access to the broad range of telecommunications and information services available today. The Commission's existing TRS rules mean that persons with hearing and speech disabilities are able to "get connected," so that they may participate fully in the economic and social fabric of American life, now shaped by the telecommunications revolution and information age. Today's actions increase their ability to participate.

In today's action the Commission modified a number of rules pertaining to mandatory minimum standards for telecommunications relay services (TRS). The Commission also resolved several petitions for reconsideration of an earlier ruling on TRS matters.

The Commission affirmed that common carriers have a continuing obligation to provide educational and outreach materials under current FCC rules and asked the FCC's Consumer Advisory Council to review issues concerning a TRS outreach campaign.

It asked for comments on technological advancements that may further the goal of functionally equivalent telecommunications services for persons with hearing and speech disabilities.

The Commission also sought comment on:

- Whether TRS facilities should receive a National Security and Emergency Preparedness Priority Status commensurate with that given to local exchange carrier facilities in the event of an emergency or national disaster to ensure functional equivalency to TRS users.
- Ways that outreach materials and efforts should be effectively distributed broadly to the public, not just to persons with disabilities, and
- Whether eligibility and certification standards should be adopted for interstate TRS providers.

TRS is mandated by the Americans with Disabilities Act to enable persons with speech or hearing disabilities to place and receive phone calls. The service is available throughout the country at no charge to the caller above their regular telephone service. TRS uses operators, called "communications assistants" (CAs), who facilitate telephone calls for people who have difficulty hearing or speaking, and other individuals. For example, a hearing person calling a deaf person would dial 711 to reach the TRS facility and a CA would dial up the deaf person to his or her TTY. The CA listens to the caller speak and the CA types what the caller says to the person who is deaf or hard of hearing, who reads the message on a TTY or other text delivery device. The CA then reads the text response and voices the message back to the hearing caller. The FCC requires telephone companies to provide TRS nationwide on a 24 hour-a-day, 7 day a week basis, at no extra cost to callers. Conversations are relayed in real-time and relay callers are not limited in the type, length, or nature of their calls.

In addition to reminding carriers of their obligation to provide outreach to raise awareness of, and increase the use of, TRS, in the Report and Order adopted today, the Commission:

- Required that emergency TRS calls be routed to the "appropriate," rather than the "nearest," Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) and that any database used to route calls to the appropriate PSAP is updated as frequently as the PSAP database used for non-TRS calls. Currently, emergency voice calls use geographic proximity as the criterion for determining the correct PSAP to which an emergency call is forwarded. This distinction is important because transmitting a call to the PSAP that is nearest in proximity to the caller in some cases may delay appropriate emergency assistance. For wireline calls, the Commission defined "*appropriate*" PSAP as the designated PSAP to which a direct call from the particular number would be delivered. For wireless calls, the Commission seeks further comment in the *Further Notice* on how to define *appropriate* PSAP for wireless TRS callers.
- Determined there was no barrier to TRS facilities accessing and applying Signaling System 7 (SS7) technology to TRS. SS7 technology will afford TRS consumers numerous benefits now widely available to voice users but not available to most TRS consumers. An example is Caller ID which would reduce the need to manually collect certain information from each TRS user, thereby speeding up the calls and allowing the efficient transfer of essential data for emergency call handling through TRS.
- Required that interstate and intrastate providers offer new types of TRS calls, including two-line voice carry over (VCO) and two-line hearing carry over (HCO). Two-line VCO, which is typically used by persons who are hard of hearing or late-deafened but have clear speech abilities, enables the person with a disability to speak directly to the other party on one line, without the assistance of a CA, and read what the other party is saying via a second line connected to the two-line VCO user's TTY. The CA hears and types the other party's words for the two-line VCO user to read. TRS users report that two-line VCO calls are more natural and efficient because the conversation moves more quickly than a one-line VCO call and allows for interruptions. Two-line HCO, most commonly used by persons who are able to hear but have impaired speech, works similarly to two-line VCO, except that one line is being used for hearing (the CA does not type the words of the other party) and the other line is used by the two-line HCO user

to transmit text on the TTY, which is then read to the other party by the CA.

- Required that TRS providers offer call release, three-way calling and speed dialing through TRS facilities.

In addition to the comments sought on the outreach program and its funding, the National Security status of TRS facilities, and certification of interstate TRS providers, the Commission sought comment on new types of calls and new technologies and Internet Protocol (IP) Relay

Copies of this press release in accessible formats are available to persons with disabilities (Braille, large print, electronic files, audio format), by sending an E-mail to fcc504@fcc.gov or by calling the Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau at 202-418-0531 (voice), 202-418-7365 (TTY).

Action by the Commission May 15, 2003, by Second Report and Order, Order on Reconsideration and Third Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 03-112). Chairman Powell, Commissioners Abernathy, Martin and Adelstein, with Commission Copps approving in part and concurring in part, and Chairman Powell and Commissioners Copps and Adelstein issuing separate statements.

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CC Docket 98-67

CG Docket 03-123

CGB contact: Cheryl J. King, at 202- 418-2284 (voice); 202-418-0416 (TTY), cking@fcc.gov (email)