

Media Contact:

Will Wiquist, (202) 418-0509
will.wiquist@fcc.gov

For Immediate Release

FCC ADOPTS REAL-TIME TEXT PROPOSED RULEMAKING
*Commission Moves Forward on Accessibility Proposal to
Modernize Wireless Phone Compatibility with Advanced Text Communications*

WASHINGTON, April 28, 2016 – The Federal Communications Commission today approved a proposal to utilize real-time text to ensure that people with disabilities who rely on text to communicate have accessible and effective telephone access. As communications networks migrate to IP-based environments, this technology would allow Americans who are deaf, hard of hearing, speech disabled or deaf-blind to use the same wireless communications devices as their friends, relatives and colleagues, and more seamlessly integrate into tomorrow’s communications networks.

The Notice of Proposed Rulemaking adopted today proposes to recognize real-time text as a replacement technology for text telephones, also known as TTY devices, on wireless phone networks, starting in December 2017 for larger carriers. It also begins to look into the possibility of a similar transition for IP-based landline phone networks.

Unlike most text messaging services, real-time text enables text to be sent immediately as it is typed, without pressing “send.” In this manner, the person receiving the text can read what the person creating the text is saying as soon as he or she creates it – thus fostering a conversational rhythm to the interaction, much as one person speaking can still hear the other person even if they talk over each other. By not requiring users to hit “send”, 911 call center personnel, for example, will be able to receive even incomplete messages.

Real-time text enables the full integration of people with disabilities into IP communications networks as they become widely available. It allows consumers using text communications to interact directly with consumers on voice phones, and vice versa. This technology can also generally function in off-the-shelf devices like common smartphones.

Since the 1970s, people with disabilities who rely on text have been using TTYs, an antiquated typewriter technology which is limited in speed (60 wpm), characters and capabilities. Because of its limitations, TTY usage is dramatically declining and TTY technology – built to operate on traditional circuit-switched phone networks – faces considerable challenges over IP networks.

In light of these difficulties, over the past year, the Commission has granted wireless carriers’ waiver requests of the Commission’s requirements to support TTY as they committed to developing and deploying real-time text services on their wireless IP networks. They and other stakeholders generally agree on the technical feasibility of RTT, as well as its superior reliability,

efficiency, character sets, features and speed over TTY. Today's NPRM responds to AT&T's petition asking the FCC to initiate a rulemaking that would authorize the industry-wide substitution of real-time text for TTY technology to meet accessibility requirements on wireless networks.

In addition to starting a modernization process for accessibility on wireless networks and asking for input on how a similar transition might work on landline networks, today's notice ensures that real-time text will be able to interface effectively with TTYs, which are still utilized by some consumers. The notice also proposes that wireless phones and other communications devices be able to support real-time text services. In addition, it proposes interoperability measures to effectively integrate real-time text services across communications systems.

Today's action also proposes a list of essential functionalities to be supported following this transition. These include the ability to initiate and receive calls from voice phone numbers and to allow simultaneous text-to-voice and voice-to-text communications. The item also proposes that systems that use real-time text support full 911 emergency communications, function consistently with low error rates, be compatible with technologies like screen readers, and be generally compatible with features voice phone users expect like leaving messages and conference calling. Many of these features were recommended for inclusion in the NPRM by the FCC's Disability Advisory Committee, which includes both industry and consumer stakeholders.

For more information about the FCC's Disability Rights Office, visit:
<https://www.fcc.gov/general/disability-rights-office>.

Action by the Commission April 28, 2016 by Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (FCC 16-53). Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel and Pai. Commissioner O'Rielly approving in part and dissenting in part. Chairman Wheeler, Commissioners Clyburn, Rosenworcel, Pai and O'Rielly issuing statements.

GN Docket No. 15-178

###

Office of Media Relations: (202) 418-0500
TTY: (888) 835-5322
Twitter: @FCC
www.fcc.gov/office-media-relations

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. Cir. 1974).