

Background

Telecommunications Relay Service (TRS) allows persons with hearing or speech disabilities to place and receive telephone calls. A communications assistant (CA) relays the call back and forth between the person with a hearing or speech disability and a voice telephone user. For example, a person with a hearing disability can communicate in text with the CA, while the CA communicates by voice with the other party to the call. The CA repeats in voice what the user has typed, and types to the TRS user what the voice telephone user has said.

There are several types of TRS that consumers can use depending on the nature of the disability and whether they have some hearing and can speak. TRS types include traditional TRS, which uses a text telephone or TTY device and a telephone line, Speech-to-Speech (STS), and Captioned Telephone Service, as well as forms of TRS that use the Internet, specifically Internet Protocol (IP) Relay, and Video Relay Service (VRS). IP Captioned Telephone Service is one of the newest forms of TRS. For a description of the various types of TRS, see FCC's consumer fact sheet at www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/trs.html.

The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has ruled that all IP Captioned Telephone Service calls could be compensated from the Interstate TRS Fund. Like all TRS calls, the relay costs associated with IP Captioned Telephone Service are not paid by users. The FCC does not mandate the provision of IP Captioned Telephone Service, and, given the way the service works, exempts it from certain minimum mandatory standards for TRS, such as emergency 911 service, three-way calling, and speed dialing.

How IP Captioned Telephone Service Works

IP Captioned Telephone Service is essentially a combination of two other forms of TRS, Captioned Telephone Service and IP Relay. Captioned Telephone Service uses a special telephone that has a text screen to display captions of what the other party to the conversation is saying. It allows a person with hearing loss, but who wants to use his or her own voice, to speak directly to the called party and then listen, to the extent possible, to the other party and simultaneously read captions of what the other party is saying. Unlike traditional TRS, which uses typed text, the CA repeats or revoices what is said, and speech recognition technology automatically transcribes the CA's voice into text transmitted directly to the user's captioned telephone text display.

How IP Captioned Telephone Service Works (cont'd.)

IP Relay is a text-based form of TRS. The CA voices what the IP Relay user has typed, and types to the user what the other party to the call has said. Unlike traditional TRS, however, the first leg of a call – the text – goes from the caller's computer or other Web-enabled device to the IP Relay center via the Internet, rather than the regular telephone network. To begin a call, the user accesses an IP Relay provider via a Web page. As with traditional TRS, the second leg of the IP Relay call, from the CA to the called party, uses the voice telephone network. For more information on IP Relay, see FCC's consumer fact sheet at www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/iprelay.html.

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How IP Captioned Telephone Service Works (cont'd.)

IP Captioned Telephone Service uses the Internet, rather than the telephone network, to provide the captions of what the other party is saying. Although this service can be provided in a variety of ways, the user (who generally can speak and has some residual hearing) may make a voice to voice call to another party on a standard telephone using the normal telephone network. The called party's response is directed from the user's telephone to a personal computer or similar device that routes it to the IP Captioned Telephone Service provider via the Internet. The provider then sends back to the user's computer the text of what was spoken. As a result, the user can both hear, to the extent possible, the called party's response over the normal telephone network, and simultaneously read the text routed via the Internet to the user's computer or similar device.

Benefits of IP Captioned Telephone Service

IP Captioned Telephone Service allows consumers to use a computer or similar device, rather than a specialized captioned telephone, to make captioned telephone calls. As a result, the service can become more widely available to consumers. In addition, it takes advantage of the increased availability of computers and Internet connections in the work place to permit persons with hearing loss to more effectively use the telephone in their jobs. Further, captions can be displayed on a computer screen in large text, variable fonts, and color, thus accommodating a wider group of disabled users, including individuals with hearing disabilities who also have low vision.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC

If you have a problem with IP Captioned Telephone Service, first try to resolve it with the provider. If you are unable to resolve it directly, you can file a complaint with the FCC. There is no charge for filing a complaint.

Filing a Complaint with the FCC (cont'd.)

You can file your complaint using the on-line complaint Form 2000C found on the FCC Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb/complaints.html. You can also file your complaint with the FCC's Consumer Center by e-mailing fccinfo@fcc.gov; calling 1-888-CALL-FCC (1-888-225-5322) voice or 1-888-TELL-FCC (1-888-835-5322) TTY; faxing 1-866-418-0232; or writing to:

Federal Communications Commission
Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau
Consumer Inquiries and Complaints Division
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554.

What to Include in Your Complaint

The best way to provide all the information the FCC needs to process your complaint is to complete fully the on-line complaint Form 2000C. If you do not use the on-line complaint Form 2000C, your complaint, at a minimum, should indicate:

- your name, address, e-mail address, and phone number where you can be reached;
- whether you are filing a complaint on behalf of another party, and if so, the party's name, address, email address, day time phone number, and your relationship to the party;
- preferred format or method of response (letter, fax, voice phone call, email, TRS, TTY, ASCII text, audio recording, or Braille);
- that your complaint is about TRS;
- the name, address, and telephone number (if known) of the company or companies involved with your complaint; and
- a brief description of your complaint and the resolution you are seeking, and a full description of the equipment or service you are complaining about, including date of purchase, use, or attempt to use.

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For More Information

For more information about IP Captioned Telephone Service or TRS, or to learn more about FCC programs to promote access to telecommunications services for people with disabilities, visit the FCC's Disability Rights Office Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro. For information about other telecommunications issues, visit the FCC's Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau Web site at www.fcc.gov/cgb, or contact the Consumer Center using the information provided for filing a complaint.

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To receive information on this and other FCC consumer topics through the Commission's electronic subscriber service, click on www.fcc.gov/cgb/contacts/.

This document is for consumer education purposes only and is not intended to affect any proceeding or cases involving this subject matter or related issues.

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