

FCC SPEECH-TO-SPEECH ROUNDTABLE (December 4, 2013)

EX PARTE: California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) Additional Supplemental Information on California Speech-to-Speech (STS) (Docket No. 08-15)

The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) provides this information in response to questions raised at the Federal Communications Commission's (FCC's) Speech-to-Speech (STS) Roundtable of December 4, 2013 and supplements the CPUC's Ex Parte Notice of December 6, 2013 in this area. The CPUC has oversight of the Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program (DDTP) in the State which provides assistive telecommunications equipment and relay service.

California provides the full range of relay service through the DDTP's California Relay Service (CRS), including STS, through two relay providers: AT&T Relay and Hamilton Relay. Hamilton Relay also provides Captioned Telephone Service. California STS follows all FCC requirements, but also includes some additional requirements which are intended to improve the STS call experience for the users of the service.

1. Traditional Speech-to-Speech (STS)

Speech-to-Speech (STS) has been available in California since 1997, prior to it being federally mandated in 2001. It was implemented at the initiative and urging of Dr. Robert Segalman, who at that time was serving on a consumer advisory board to the California Public Utilities Commission. The following reflect current CRS contract requirements.

1.1. California STS Contract Terms

- STS reimbursement rate is based on session minutes and is bid separately from other TRS rates.
 - Hamilton Relay: \$3.26 per session minute
 - AT&T Relay: \$2.39 per session minute

1.2. Other California Contract Requirements

- Additional training for STS CAs
 - In addition to initial TRS CA training, STS CAs must receive at least 40 hours of total training specific to STS services before handling live STS calls.
 - In addition to ongoing TRS CA training, STS CAs must receive a minimum of 10 hours follow-up STS refresher training annually
- STS CAs shall be able to retain information from one inbound call for use in a subsequent outbound call. Such information shall only be retained for the duration of the inbound call.
- STS Subject Matter Expert (SME)

- Person with a speech disability or otherwise familiar with the STS service, or a professional working with speech-disabled clients
- Designated to serve as the STS expert to the CPUC and DDTP advisory committees
- The current providers also involve their SMEs in the training of the Communications Assistants (CAs) and in their outreach.
- Providers can claim reimbursement of up to 1000 SME hours per year at \$75/hour.
- STS Customer Profile fields
 - California STS providers are required to offer a separate STS Customer Profile that includes the basic TRS fields, plus a number of STS-specific fields, including:
 - Registration of the user's phone numbers by day-of-the-week and time-of-day
 - STS user's name
 - Mute or not mute transmission of the STS user's voice to the other party
 - Retain Information from one inbound call for subsequent calls? (yes or no)
 - Use Visually Assisted STS (yes or no)
 - Use of voice synthesizer and Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices (yes or no)
 - Role of the STS CA (e.g. re-voicing everything that is said, or only things that have not been understood?)
 - Before dialing ask: "Shall I tell the party who is calling?" (yes or no)
 - Who will explain STS CA to other party?
 - Require CA to confirm call handling preferences before dialing requested number (yes or no)
 - Standard first thoughts (brief standard messages that can be re-used in several calls)
 - Standard message to leave on answering machine
 - Frequently called numbers (which may be requested by name rather than number):
 - Telephone number with area code, and extension if applicable
 - Name or title of the called party
 - Familiar with STS? (yes or no)
 - Type of call: business, financial, personal/social, other
 - Other Special Instructions to the CA

1.3. STS Call Data

	Completed STS Inbound Calls	STS Session Minutes	Completed STS Outbound Calls	STS Conversation Minutes
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2011	62,150	473,855	81,477	304,740
2012	42,665	279,007	53,702	154,075
2013 (Jan – Oct)	27,747	159,967	27,948	88,739

2. STS User Training Line (UTL)

The STS UTL was a mandatory/optional requirement of the current CRS RFP, which means that it was mandatory for the bidders to offer it, but optional for the State to purchase it. The CPUC opted to start a STS UTL Pilot program during the current CRS contracts.

STS UTL calls are reimbursed at the STS per-session-minute rate.

The STS UTL can be used by current or potential STS users (including family and friends who do now, or may in the future, communicate with them via STS) who reside in California. Professionals (such as Speech-Language Pathologists) who work with California residents (or non-residents who wish to communicate with California residents) with speech disabilities are also able to use the STS UTL.

The STS UTL Pilot program began in October 2010. Both CRS providers are required to provide a STS UTL in English and have the option to also offer it in Spanish. Currently, one of the providers offers STS UTL in English only; the other provider offers it in both English and Spanish.

2.1. Hours of Service:

- AT&T Relay: Mon – Fri, 9am – 5pm PT, or by appointment
- Hamilton Relay: 24/7/365

2.2. STS UTL Data

Data reported by the current CRS providers for the STS UTL is shown below:

	UTL Inbound Calls	UTL Session Minutes
2011	32	222
2012	15	122
2013 (Jan – Oct)	100	520

3. Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech (VA STS)

VA STS was a mandatory/optional requirement of the 2010 CRS RFP. The CPUC opted to start a VA STS Pilot program during the current CRS contract.

VA STS calls are reimbursed at the STS per-session-minute rate.

VA STS adds a video component to a STS call, enabling the STS CA to see the STS user during a call. This allows the CA to see the caller's mouth movements, body language, signs the user may hold up, etc., which helps the CA to understand what the STS user is saying.

After extensive research and beta testing, the VA STS Pilot program began in May 2012. Skype™ was selected as the video service to facilitate the video connection between the STS user and the CA.

Currently VA STS is only offered in English. Spanish may be added at a later date.

3.1. What does a user need to make VA STS calls?

- A computer (PC or Apple®) with a webcam or comparable equipment to access the video service;
- A telephone near the video device for the voice connection to the VA STS CA (A device with a speakerphone is recommended);
- Access to high-speed Internet with a minimum bandwidth of 256k upload/download speed. See the Skype™ Web site for specific [system requirements](#) and [bandwidth requirements](#) to make Skype™ video calls;
- The ability to operate the equipment (independently or with the assistance of a caregiver).

3.2. VA STS Hours of Service

- Hamilton Relay: 24/7/365
- AT&T Relay: Mon – Fri 8am – 8pm PT, or by appointment

3.3. VA STS Call Process

- STS user logs into Skype™
- User calls 711 or one of the two relay service providers' VA STS access numbers by telephone, and indicates they would like to make a VA STS call.
- (Unless saved in the Customer Profile) User provides Skype™ account information to VA STS CA.

- The VA STS CA will establish the video connection with the user.
 - This is a one-way video connection, which means the CA can see the user, but the user cannot see the CA.
- User provides the number to dial and specific call handling instructions
- The VA STS CA places the outbound voice call and, if needed, explains the VA STS service.
- VA STS CA will relay call over the telephone line and, at the same time, use the video connection to assist them in understanding what the user is saying.
- The person called is not connected by video.
- The STS user can also type words or phrases through instant messaging (IM) to VA STS CA (offered only by one of the CRS providers).

3.4. VA STS Call Data

	Completed VA STS Inbound Calls	VA STS Session Minutes	Completed VA STS Outbound Calls	VA STS Conversation Minutes
2012 (May – Dec)	315	2,533	226	1,435
2013 (Jan – Oct)	369	2,677	226	1,493

VA STS calls constitute approximately 1% of all STS calls. California has not seen a huge number of STS callers migrate to VA STS, but based on the data and the feedback that CRS is receiving, it appears that there is a small number of regular users. Due to the additionally required equipment and service components, and the increased complexity of the service, CRS is expecting VA STS to remain a service that addresses the needs and interests of a very small user population.

3.5. Anecdotal VA STS Feedback from Testing (March 2011 – April 2012)

In collaboration with the CRS providers, VA STS was carefully tested before it was rolled out as a service available to the public. Testers were asked to provide feedback on their experiences. In general, the majority of testers felt that having the additional video component improved the testers' STS call experience significantly or at least somewhat.

VA STS is definitely helpful. Use of Skype's IM feature will help tremendously [...].

I am not sure the call would have been successful without the video component.

The CA is able to get whether or not he/she has understood me right. It cuts down how many times the CA “barks down the wrong tree”.

I am able to make facial expressions or indicate a number with my fingers to help the CA.

- Users of Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices felt that the video feature was not able to improve their call experience, since they use the audio output of their device, which can generally be understood over the phone without assistance.

I would typically just use my communication device over the phone.

Person has her device setup in a way that allows her to make calls without the help of an assistant or relay service: pre-programmed messages, cell phone directly attached to the device for better audio quality.

- Several users had requested a two-way video connection.

Would prefer to see operator's face, so I feel more connected with her, instead of her just looking at me.

- Several users commented on the complexity of the setup (phone plus computer). They requested to eliminate the phone component to simplify the call process.

There is clearly a learning curve on both relaying and making VA STS calls, as there was in making STS calls.

The problem is that you have to use the telephone and a computer. That is a lot to ask of to make a simple phone call.

4. STS Outreach Efforts

STS outreach efforts differ from those for traditional relay service given the unique qualities of this service and the difficulty of identifying potential STS users. Since the beginning of the current relay contracts, there have been a number of STS outreach initiatives targeted at informing speech-disabled individuals, family members, care takers and other professionals working with speech-disabled individuals about the availability and features of STS.

- Seeking collaboration with speech-language professionals & their member organizations in California
 - Presentation at the Board meeting of the California Speech-Language & Hearing Association (CSHA)
 - Offering STS workshops for professionals offered to CSHA & Medical Speech-Language Pathology Council of California (MSCC)
 - STS article in CSHA magazine
- Publishing STS/VA STS information in newsletters of organizations that serve a population with speech disabilities
- VA STS launch press release (May 2012)
- Developing “STS Starter Kit” for speech-language professionals working with speech disabled clients, and (December 2012)
- STS Training Video (February 2013)
 - Information on STS and VA STS, including demo calls; customizing relay calls
 - Parts have been used by FCC during their Public Meeting on July 19, 2013
- STS presentations at professional conferences (CSHA 2013, Supported Life 2013)
- DDTP website pages for [STS](#) and [VA STS](#) that provide information and resources (see <http://ddtp.cpuc.ca.gov/default1.aspx?id=1489>)
- DDTP Outreach staff attending STS relevant events and support group meetings (ongoing)