



Presentation to the Canadian Radio-television and  
Telecommunications Commission

***Telecom Notice of Consultation CRTC 2013-155:  
Issues Related to the Feasibility of Establishing Video  
Relay Services (VRS)***

October 25, 2013  
Conference Centre Portage IV, Outaouais Hearing Room  
140 Promenade du Portage  
Gatineau, Quebec

Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Commissioners and CRTC staff.

Thank you for this opportunity to present our points about Video Relay Services (VRS) to this proceeding.

My name is Frank Folino. I am the President of the Canadian Association of the Deaf and I am seated besides another representative is our Executive Director, James Roots.

We are the oldest national Deaf consumers organization in this country, founded in 1940 that undertakes information, research and community action of Deaf people in Canada who uses English/ASL and French/LSQ communities. We promote and protect the rights, needs, and concerns of those who are linguistically and culturally Deaf. CAD estimates that there are approximately 350,000 Canadians who are profoundly Deaf and whose preferred mode of communication is Sign Languages (ASL and LSQ).

We strongly in the full support of the CRTC requiring the provision of VRS on a national basis for both the English/ASL and French/LSQ communities requiring 24/7 VRS services including all features and call centres, technology, 911 and etc for the design and functional equivalency requirements that has been mentioned from the beginning of the CRTC hearing week. Anything less than 24 hours a day, seven days a week would be unacceptable and contrary to equality jurisprudence; however, we recognize these important challenges on the financial and administration of the VRS that we will support the phasing for 5 years outlined in the Mission Consulting report.

CAD sent an official letter to the CRTC on September 19, 2012 with over 70 organizations, service agencies, interpreters and grassroots groups across Canada including English/ASL and French/LSQ that we remind the CRTC to acknowledge that access to telecommunication is basic human rights for everyone where VRS is urgently needed to continue this progress towards true accessibility for Deaf Canadians.

There is no questions at all that Deaf Canadians are eagerly waiting for VRS because VRS is an investment that will generate the full, productive participation of Deaf Canadians in social, economic, political and cultural aspects in our official spoken language (English and French) and our official signed languages (ASL and LSQ).

We would like to emphasize that the principles of accessibility as defined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom, the Canadian Human Rights Act, and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities states that Deaf Canadians have the full and equal access to telecommunications which VRS will provide towards to their workplace, their community, their families and labour market delivery with equal opportunities in both Deaf and hearing communities.

### **Benefits of VRS**

VRS will significantly reduce the communication barrier that currently restricts the social and economic participation of Deaf individuals to the benefit of both the Deaf individuals and the community at large (such as hearing people).

Having VRS will remove this barrier that allows for increased employment opportunities and advancement including:

- Reduced social welfare and health costs
- Engagement in the economy as consumers, employers and employees
- Increased productivity and versatility due to more typical telephone communication
- Increased independence and self-esteem
- Access to education resources offered via telecommunication
- Access to conference calls
- Enhanced self employment opportunities

In addition, VRS allows telecommunications in the native language of the Deaf individuals who uses ASL and LSQ instead of forcing the Deaf individual to use a secondary language, which is English and French. According to the Mission Consulting report, an important difference between text-based relay and VRS is the speed of communication, which is significantly improved with VRS. Voice telephony has an average conversation speed of 170 words per minutes (wpm), text relay averages 30 wpm, and VRS averages 150 wpm.

VRS will be used for the same things for which hearing persons also uses their telecommunication services such as connecting with banks, hotline, medical, retails, and other government services. For example, if a Deaf youth person who has a bullying issues and would like to contact hotline through VRS service will enhance a speed of communication with a smooth process that will given a Deaf

person to let the feeling out through a hotline instead using the IP relay or TTY will restrict their freedom of the true native language in ASL and LSQ.

### **VRS Funding and Administration**

A new centralized contribution fund would be the best way to proceed. Every TSP and ISP and wireless service provider should pay into this fund on a pro rata basis. CAD submits that all – including those with revenues less than \$10 million – TSPs and ISPs should pay.

CAD recommends that the Mission Consulting proposals be adopted:

- Following the recommended phased deployment, the maximum total annual program cost for 24/7 unrestricted VRS is estimated at \$32 million dollar.
- VRS providers be paid per video Interpreter hour: In this option, a VRS program office contracts with provider(s) to staff for VRS calls, and pays for the staffing level regardless of how many calls are handled or how many minutes are issued. This significantly reduces the potential for fraud and provides for managed interpreter efficiency.
- A payment methodology be adopted that uses a fixed amount for a specific time period to obtain information, which can then be used to determine the appropriate compensation model, (i.e., consumer usage rates, average answer times, differences in availability and costs of interpreters in different cities or regions, etc.).
- Mission Consulting has provided a list of ways that provider fraud in VRS can be prevented. (*Phase 10, VRS Cost Variables and Forecasts: Section 5.1, Fraudulent VRS Costs*)

In the terms of the governance, CAD recommends that the Mission Consulting proposed be adopted:

A third party administrator as proposed by Mission Consulting should be responsible for managing the funds from the TSPs and ISPs and wireless service providers to set VRS operational standards, acquire and operate a VRS platform and database that would be required to be used by all VRS providers, contract for VRS services, monitor services for quality and other considerations and periodically report to the CRTC.

The administrator would also enter into and manage contracts and grants for delivery of VRS as authorized by the Board that the CEO with Board approval would develop an Annual Budget and Business Plan that would form the basis upon which TSPs' and ISPs' funding obligations would be set.

To assure VRS is operated in a manner that meets the needs of the Deaf community, the Board of the third party administrator must be staffed and controlled by at least 75% Deaf consumer membership. If there is no Board set up then it becomes essential that the VRS administration and the CRTC staff responsible have significant Deaf involvement. In this context, "significant" indicates a minimum of 75% of the personnel.

The final design of VRS in Canada should be based on one ASL provider and one LSQ provider under the centralized fund with one platform including interoperability, features and call centre capabilities of VRS technologies that will address through well-defined specifications and quality of services metrics.

### **VRS Interpreters**

CAD agrees that extra steps should be taken to minimize the impact on community interpreting and that consideration should be given to a requirement that VRS interpreters do an equal or at least a significant amount of community interpreting.

In Mission Consulting proposals that outlined about the first phase (Phase 12 Section 7.1.2) should initiate the third party administrator who will provide grants to Canadian college and university interpreter training programs to provide an initially restricted service while gathering further data on usage and costs. The college and university program grant recipients would be encouraged to partner with interpreter referral agencies. The grants could also be expanded to directly include interpreter referral agencies. This phase will also ensure both ASL and LSQ can be accommodated.

Begin with an initial research phase (VRS deployment) with multiple Canadian interpreter training programs, and then expand the research/VRS deployment to include multiple Canadian interpreter agencies. After the research phase fully deploy VRS through multiple interpreter training programs, agencies, and experienced VRS providers

Qualified interpreters are the most crucial part of any VRS. Organizations that already focus their energy on ASL or LSQ interpreting within Canada are best suited to provide VRS. Additionally, the involvement of Canadian interpreter agencies can facilitate a balance between community interpreting needs and VRS, while involving Canadian interpreter training programs will, in the long term, facilitate the development of more Canadian interpreters to serve both community interpreting and VRS.

Considering Canada's shortage of interpreters, landscape and low population density, the recommendation is to make maximum use of the entities that already have pre-established relationships with interpreters in the communities where they live; this will foster the development of more interpreters and the development of necessary VRS standards, and will also result in the growth of LSQ-French VRS providers that will focus on the needs of the LSQ community.

A collaboration and involvement with the single training program at UQAM and Le Service d'Interprétation Visuelle et Tactile (SIVET), the regional agencies in Quebec is imperative to any LSQ VRS offering. The LSQ-French and ASL-English VRS providers need to be separate but equal. Realistically, if they were combined it is very unlikely that they would be "equal". The equity between LSQ/French VRS and ASL/English VRS should be firmly established and supported in policy, funding and operations.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

The same privacy and confidentiality requirement that is currently apply to the traditional MRS and the IPR must apply to VRS and to achieve this following points:

- Consumer confidentiality and privacy requirements imposed by the CRTC upon all TSPs should be required of all VRS providers.
- System, network and data security include the confidentiality and privacy of consumer personal data which should be safeguarded by adherence to clearly defined rules and policies that apply to all personnel and business practices.
- VRS interpreters should be trained in ethical issues related to transparency, privacy and confidentiality, roles and responsibilities, and the conflicts, processes and remedies that may be employed when fraud or misuse is encountered or is suspected of being perpetrated upon Deaf consumers. These are issues that have specific application within VRS

that are distinct from community interpreting issues. VRS providers can be required to provide this type of training before interpreters are permitted to handle live VRS calls.

- Privacy standards be included in contracts between VRS providers and funding entity and third party administrator.
- There be additional training for interpreters to identify fraud or misuse of relay

## **Education and Outreach**

Deaf organizations across Canada should offer education and outreach according to their expertise and constituent communities from English/ASL and French/LSQ and VRS providers should be expected to perform some direct outreach activities to VRS consumers so that they can make themselves available to learn directly from consumers on what service improvements are desired.

Consumer advocacy and social organizations are also best suited to provide the most outreach to their members who are potential VRS consumers and government social agencies are best suited to provide educational campaigns to the general public, especially to the hearing population in Canada.

The coordination will be required by the third party administrator from the CRTC that will be responsible to implement all education and outreach initiatives on VRS.

## **9-1-1 and VRS**

CAD would like to see the establishment of VRS to 9-1-1 during the implementation of VRS at the measured research phase of VRS that outlined from Mission Consulting report.

It is important to point out that the overnight hours on these calls might be the most importance for emergencies services including broadcasts system in VRS and mobile devices as well too such as natural disasters, weather warnings, amber alerts, and etc. We ask the CRTC to set the regulations requiring the emergency 9-1-1 call centres to be technologically accessible and compatible with VRS during the research phase and the implementation of the services.

A well designed research phase will provide the information that is needed for the completion of a final detailed program design and requirements, such as a

consumer registration and preferences, call flow and networking, VRS interpreter qualifications, reporting, minimizing opportunities for fraud and waste, interface with 9-1-1 and necessary interpreter training, platform suitability, consumer education, provider projections, usage factors and forecasts, contract requirements and etc that will be through the centralized administration fund.

## **Conclusion**

We would like to mention that a speech by Jean Pierre Blais, Chairman to the Standing Committee on the Canadian Heritage on October 4, 2012 that quotes “Finally, Canadians are also residential and business consumers. They want a choice of high-quality, reliable communication services at affordable prices that respond to their needs.” Following the Chairman’s speech, a position was created called The Chief Consumer Officer that is responsible to ensure that the needs and interests of consumers are at the heart of our decision-making process, our research and our outreach.

We are asking today to the CRTC based on the Chairman’s speech, we want you to take swift action to ensure that Deaf Canadians have the full and equal access to telecommunications, which VRS will provide to all Deaf people in Canada who uses English/ASL and French/LSQ communities.

We welcome your questions. Thank you!