



BRIEF SUMMARY HISTORY OF THE FIGHT FOR VRS (VIDEO RELAY SERVICE) IN CANADA

2004-6:

- in 2004, Canadian Association of the Deaf collected information about VRS to present to the 2005 conference that was hosted by the Alberta Association of the Deaf in Edmonton as part of the celebration of our 65th Anniversary.
- the conference was held in July of 2005.
- at this 2005 conference, CAD reported that the best approach seemed to be three steps:
 - Step 1: form a corporation responsible for bringing VRS to Canada.
 - Step 2: the new corporation should hold a “call for proposals” to establish VRS in Canada.
 - Step 3: the new corporation would work with the winner of the call for proposals to ask CRTC how we could bring VRS to Canada.
- this proposal was approved by the attendees at the conference (unanimously). It was agreed that CAD, Canadian Cultural Society of the Deaf, Association of Visual Language Interpreters of Canada, and independent community representatives would form a VRS Committee to act as the founding board members of the new corporation.

2006-8:

- in March of 2006, the new corporation was formally approved by the federal government as Sign Relay Canada - Service de Relay Canada (SRC).
- a call for proposals was issued. If I recall correctly, 4 proposals were received: Sorensen, Sprint, Hamilton, and I forget the fourth one. Sprint was chosen the winner.
- over the next two years, SRC worked closely with Sprint to negotiate with CRTC, and to find out what process CRTC would require us to follow.
- it was also in 2006 that the CRTC announced it would begin proceedings on how to dispose of the “deferral accounts” that had built up in telecom companies over the previous 8 years. CAD and SRC insisted that at least SOME of millions of dollars in these “deferral accounts” MUST be used to bring VRS to Canada.
- literally THOUSANDS of pages have been filed on the deferral accounts issue since 2006. CAD and SRC have been extremely high-profile participants in these discussions, ALWAYS insisting that money must be set aside to pay for VRS.
- meanwhile, after two years of lobbying CRTC and doing research, Sprint’s contract with SRC expired in 2008.

2008-12:

- believe it or not, the deferral accounts proceedings are STILL going on today, but now they are focused on “unresolved accessibility issues”. CAD continues to demand these funds be used for VRS.
- CRTC made two very important rulings in 2009-10:

-- they ruled that only existing telecom service providers would be eligible for funding to set-up VRS in Canada.

-- they ordered Bell to do a trial VRS in Ontario and Quebec, and Telus to do a trial VRS in BC and Alberta.

-- the first ruling meant SRC could never become a funded VRS provider. Only telecoms like Bell, Telus, Rogers, etc. could become VRS providers.

-- in response to the second ruling, Bell decided a trial would not be able to gather the information needed to plan for a sustainable (permanent) VRS. Bell asked the CRTC for permission to do a comprehensive feasibility study instead of doing a trial. CRTC approved. The feasibility study began in early 2011 and will be completed in late February 2012.

-- Telus partnered with Sorensen to do its trial VRS in BC and Alberta. This trial has been extended at least once. It is due to end January 15th. Deaf consumers need to understand this trial was funded entirely out of Telus' own deferral account money. That money is limited and it cannot be increased; Telus *must* spend all deferral account money and no new money can be put into that account. This is why Telus is saying it cannot afford to extend the VRS trial past January 15th.

The Canadian Association of the Deaf has *ALWAYS*** supported a NATIONAL VRS in Canada. We have NEVER supported the idea of VRS for only some provinces and not others. It must be fair: VRS for every province and territory!**

The CAD has also always supported ASL-LSQ equivalency. We cannot support a national VRS that does not provide services in both ASL and LSQ. Canada is a bilingual English-French country, and CAD as a national organization must always support a bilingual ASL-LSQ VRS.