



***CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION  
NEWFOUNDLAND CHAPTER (CHHA-NC)***

***A Disability Access Presentation to the:***

**CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION AGENCY (CTA)  
REVIEW PANEL**

**Fairmont Hotel, St. John's, NF, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001**

**by**

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**February, 2001**

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## ***CANADIAN HARD OF HEARING ASSOCIATION NEWFOUNDLAND CHAPTER (CHHA-NC)***

### **CANADIAN TRANSPORT AGENCY (CTA) REVIEW PANEL**

**St. John's, NF, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 2001**

#### **Introduction**

This presentation is being given by the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association - Newfoundland Chapter (CHHA-NC) which is a registered, incorporated, and not-for-profit, charity. We are a provincial affiliate of the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA), and it is our pleasure to welcome you to beautiful St. John's. CHHA is the National voice of all Hard of Hearing Canadians. It is a self-help, bilingual, consumer organization run by and for persons who are hard of hearing. Its mission is : *to raise public awareness concerning issues that are important for persons who are hard of hearing, to promote their integration in Canadian society, to remove any barriers to their participation and to generally make every community in Canada a better place to live for persons who are hard of hearing.*

As members of a review panel on travel in our country, we are sure you can appreciate some of the unique problems that travelers encounter in trying to come to our island province by sea and air. The City of St. John's, having the distinction of being the oldest city in North America, has quite a collection of narrow, winding, steep and one-way streets that present quite a challenge to drivers in summer, let alone in winter. Given the huge amounts of snow that St. John's has had and continues to have, residents and new travelers to our city are encountering some challenges. But we hope you don't have too much of a challenge getting around town during your brief stay.

However, the challenge for today, is for us make some recommendations to this review panel with the hope that they will have some value for the transportation industry of Canada. Since our association, CHHA-NC, is a community based agency that provides support services and programs for hard of hearing consumers, this presentation is focused on the provision of creating better transportation accessibility for public carriers. These carriers provide services in three main travel areas - sea, air, and land (rail and roads) and we will be making some general guidelines for access that apply to all three.

However, the main focus for this presentation will be on airport accessibility as that is the mode of transportation that most people use. Another reason that we have a particular interest in airport accessibility is that the St. John's International Airport is undergoing extensive renovations and our association is working with the CEO, Mr. Rex LeDrew and the Board of the St. John's Airport Authority to make the new airport as accessible as possible for hard of hearing travelers. Our presentation is also another voice in support of CHHA which advocates for accessibility issues on a national level. You may be interested to note that our National President, Mr. Colin Cantlie, is a former airline pilot and consultant to the industry and has a particular interest in the recommendations that this panel will make.

Before we move to the specifics of our presentation, I would like to draw your attention to some handouts that have been included in your Information Kits. These are intended to provide you with background information about our association and include:

- a. CHHA - NC Brochure - Objectives of the Association; Programs and Services
- b. History of CHHA-NC
- c. How Noise Can Harm You
- d. Frequently Asked Questions
- e. How to Communicate with People who are Hard of Hearing or Deaf
- f. Assistive Listening System and IR Receivers
- g. Outline of a Counter Loop System
- h. CHHA-NC Newsletter - Sound Waves

Normally, these would have provided to you before you came so that you would have been provided a better understanding the barriers hard of hearing persons live with daily. However, due to the late date when we found out about the hearings, time constraints did not permit an information package to be readied earlier. We hope that you will have time to read the enclosed handouts later.

### **Demographics of Hearing Loss**

The hard of hearing are people who may have a hearing loss of any degree from mild to profound but communicate primarily by speech, helped by hearing aids, and speech reading and using their brains to interpret what they see and hear imperfectly. Many also need assistive technical devices to allow them to lead fully interactive and reasonably normal lives. In Canada,

at least 10% to 15% of the population, or about 3.5 million people are hard of hearing. In Newfoundland and Labrador, that percentage translates into approximately 55,000 people. However, in the Seniors population, which is predicted to make up 25-30% of the overall population within 25 years, the number of seniors with hearing loss is between 40-50%. It is hard to get an exact number as the statistics used come from self-reported forms and since hearing loss is considered an embarrassment by many people, it is often under-reported.

### **Living with Hearing Loss**

Hearing loss is invisible and therefore not always recognized as the serious disability it can be, nor has it received much public attention. In addition, the ramifications of this socially-isolating disability can cause the individual to withdraw from society and become invisible. It is usually recognized only if one takes notice of a person's hearing aid(s) or when they have difficulty in communicating with a hard of hearing person. If left untreated, hearing loss can seriously limit accessibility to education, employment, travel and the enjoyment of everyday social events that most hearing people take for granted. It is a very serious disability that has a major, negative impact on many areas of a person's life, and for many, can lead to isolation, withdrawal from society, depression and, in extreme cases, suicide. However, we are pleased to note that this situation is slowly changing due to the efforts of groups like CHHA-NC and other health professionals who work diligently to educate the public and to promote hearing loss issues. However, much more remains to be done, especially in the area of travel accessibility, hence, our reason for being here today.

The most common solution to hearing loss problems are the use of hearing aids, however, they should be only one step in a comprehensive Aural Rehabilitation program. Contrary to what many may think, hearing aids do not restore normal hearing either in quality or volume, and an individual may only have one hearing aid when often, they need two. As well, unwanted environmental noise is amplified by hearing aids, thereby masking speech. For many hard of hearing persons, speech is often distorted even with the use of hearing aids, so that many can only recognize 25 % of the words spoken to them. The remaining 75% of comprehension is gained by assumption, guesswork and deduction. This is physically and mentally tiring and very stressful.

## **What is it like to be hard of hearing ?**

It is almost impossible for a hearing person to know what it is like to be hard of hearing, just as it is equally difficult to know what it is like to be blind, or to suffer from any particular disability unless one lives with it. However, while it is possible to have some understanding based on one's education, experience and involvement with people with special needs, complete understanding comes from having lived with hearing loss and its isolating effects. Imagine, if you can, what it would be like to be enclosed in plastic, in a **COCOON OF SILENCE**; to be surrounded by an 'invisible' barrier that cuts you off from many of the sounds you hear daily, the sounds you take for granted, such as music, doorbells, telephones, your friend's voices. Everyday sounds are garbled, distorted, low, or it sounds like everyone is mumbling. You can see, taste, smell, touch, but you cannot hear or you hear imperfectly which can lead to many embarrassing situations.

## **Some Final Points About Hearing Loss**

To gain a better understanding of what it means to be hard of hearing in a hearing world, it is also important to know the following points in relation to hearing loss:

1. Hearing aids do not restore normal hearing, either in quality or volume. All environmental or background sounds are amplified by hearing aids thereby masking or interfering with speech sounds. It takes time for the brain to filter these sounds and to focus on speech.
2. Loss of hearing is unique to each individual, therefore, the severity of the loss and the adaptation to the loss is also unique, resulting in a wide range of rehabilitative responses.
3. Hard of hearing people must concentrate intently to understand what is being said. This is very tiring and stressful and often leads to problems in dealing with fellow employees, employers, friends, family and other people on a daily basis.
4. Many hard of hearing persons are undereducated and underemployed for many of the reasons already mentioned, which often forces hard of hearing persons and their families to live at or below the poverty level. Hard of hearing persons may also face developmental problems in education, social, psychological, emotional and intellectual areas.

## **What are Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs) ?**

An assistive listening device is any piece of equipment that helps us to hear better. The ones in use here today are of a type used by hard of hearing persons. These devices are often used with or in place of hearing aids, however, using the two of them together are an excellent aid to better communication. Assistive listening devices use two basic communication formats to transmit and receive sound signals - Frequency Modulation (FM) or radio waves and Infra-Red (IR) or light waves. Both are very effective and accomplish the objective of helping people to hear better, but there is a significant difference between the two. The FM signal is transmitted beyond the boundaries of a room because it is a radio signal, while the IR signal is contained within a room because they work on light waves. Thus, the IR signal guarantees privacy if needed, while the FM signal does not.

ALDs come in many shapes and sizes and are usually attached to everyday communication devices to send the audio signal from the sound source to the hard of hearing listener through a special receiver similar to a walkman. To listen, regular headphones or ear buds can be used if the listener does not have hearing aids, or wears in the ear or canal aids. For those who wear Behind-the-Ear (BTE) hearing aids, which Mel and I do, these must have a special T-Switch to pick up the electronic signal from the audio source. The T-Switch is a small magnetic coil in the hearing aid (not all hearing aids have them but should), that picks up the magnetic emissions given off by all electronic devices. Fortunately, these emissions carry the audio signal also so that assistive devices can pick up the messages being sent.

There are handouts in your folders containing pictures of IR Receivers with different attachments that can be used by the wearer. FM systems are similar in size and shape and can use the same attachments. The attachments include: Stethoscope; Silhouette - flat, ear shaped attachments that are inserted between the BTE and the head to pick up the signal; Induction Neck Loop; and, not shown - headphones, earbuds, and Direct Audio Input (DAI) meaning wires from the receiver plug directly into the BTE via a special shoe that fits over the end of the hearing aid.

## **Barriers to Travel for the Hard of Hearing**

The lack of - *Awareness, Advocacy, Access* - represent the barriers that exist for hard of hearing persons in general, not just hard of hearing travelers. The number of persons with disabilities in our society stands at 16% and growing, an incredibly high number for a country that is regarded around the world as the best place to live, and which has the highest standard of living. This is probably true for those without disabilities, but if you ask many of those people who live with disabilities every day of their lives, you will, in the majority of cases, receive quite a different answer. Most people with disabilities would probably say that mainstream society is indifferent to their needs. There is a lack of *Awareness* of the barriers to daily living that cause so much frustration for persons with disabilities. There is a lack of *Advocacy* by people who are not disabled on behalf of those who are and those who do are often disregarded as trouble makers and malcontents. There is a lack of *Access* to public facilities for persons with disabilities, particularly for the hard of hearing. Unfortunately, by not educating themselves and not speaking out, many hard of hearing persons are their own worst enemies and hurt the efforts of those groups, like CHHA-NC, who try to help. Thus, it is our belief, that until there is better *Awareness, Advocacy and Access*, not much will change and unfortunately, barriers to travel for persons with disabilities will continue.

## **Accessibility Recommendations**

One of the key questions to be addressed by your Review Panel was - *Should new measures or new mechanisms be introduced to address the transportation needs of persons with disabilities ?* The simple answer is an emphatic **YES !** However, the reality is that there is usually a large difference between what should be done, what is supposed to be done and what is actually done. Various guidelines and, in some instances, laws and regulations have existed for a number of years but are often ignored or circumvented. The usual excuse is that it costs too much to implement. The reality, however, is that most accessibility guidelines, can be implemented with relatively little cost. What is lacking is simply the will to make it happen. Hopefully, the recommendations that you will put forth, as a result of these hearings, will cause public carriers to find the will to do the right thing by making all travel as accessible as possible for hard of

hearing persons and other travelers with disabilities.

We are pleased to make to make the following recommendations to improve air transport regulations specifically, and that, where it is practicable, that these recommendations should also be applied to other areas of public transportation. It is our belief that most of these are transferable with minor modifications to suit the particular mode of travel being discussed.

1. ***Training***

An ongoing training program for all booking office, travel agency, airport and plane employees who come into contact with travelers with disability is a number one priority. Such training will create greater awareness and appreciation of the barriers encountered in travel for persons with disabilities.

2. ***Bookings***

- a. “Hard of Hearing” should be stamped on the ticket folder and entered in the computer if the ticket buyer agrees.
- b. Seating in the quietest part of the airplane should be permitted.
- c. The CTA Booklet - A Guide for Persons with Disabilities, should be provided when a person with a disability is identified. These should also be placed on counters at all airports and updated yearly.

3. ***Airport***

- a. Counter attendants should face the traveler when speaking.
- b. A Counter Loop should be placed on the counter. This is a preferred amplifying system. In its absence a personal FM system or a one-to-one communicator should be kept at the counter.
- c. Hard of hearing travelers should explain that they may not hear or understand notices given on the public address system. They may need to be alerted personally for important information applicable to them. They must indicate where they are to be found and they should remain near the counter so they can be alerted to announcements. Seating should

be available specifically for these people.

- d. Visual signs - Monitors should be placed at a lower level. They are usually too high to be easily seen. Large, clear, well-lit ticker-tape type signage would increase independence for the hard of hearing because it is more easily visible.

#### 4. ***The Telephone***

- a. TTD/TTY
- b. Compatible telephones with amplifying handsets in fully enclosed wheelchair accessible kiosks (telephones are usually noisy areas in airports and they're of no use to most hard of hearing travelers. Also, they are usually in use by other travelers and often not available).
- c. Clearly visible accessibility signs placed at the site of accessible telephones and in other key traffic areas to inform people of where they are.

#### 5. ***Security Area***

- a. Preboarding can be helpful, so that there is an opportunity after boarding to tell the flight attendant of personal needs.

#### 6. ***On the plane***

- a. The flight attendant must alert hard of hearing persons before speaking to them. The noise of the plane may make it impossible for hard of hearing individuals to know that someone is trying to communicate with them unless they are alerted first.
- b. Hard of hearing travelers must be told of any important announcement. Announcements may be loud enough but not clear enough to be understood.
- c. An FM system or a one-to-one communicator with induction loops should be available on all planes. Lipreading is very difficult particularly if lighting is dimmed. Written communication may be needed if a personal communicator or FM system is not available.
- d. Amplified phones are not yet available but should be provided on planes that promote this service.
- e. An educational video on the rights of disabled travelers should be developed and shown during in-flight movies as a means of creating awareness among all members of the public.

## Conclusion

CHHA-NC believes that society's attitudes are slowly changing and that improvements are happening as we speak and will continue to happen until public facilities become fully accessible. The number of voices who are beginning to speak out cannot continue to be ignored. Since its inception as the Newfoundland Hearing Association (NHA) and now as CHHA-NC, our association has worked diligently to improve ***Awareness, Advocacy, Access***, and we will continue to do so. We are also proud to say that we have made some great gains in all three of these areas, especially in the City of St. John's. Our goal, over time is to broaden this work across the province. We will do our part; we now ask you to ensure that government does its part, by making strong recommendations for real changes to current accessibility transportation regulations. We also ask that you refer to the CTA document - ***Communication Barriers: A Look at Barriers to Communication Facing Persons with Disabilities Who Travel by Air***. Section 2.2.2 makes many excellent recommendations that, if implemented, would erase, most if not all communication barriers that exist for hard of hearing travelers. We ask that you strongly suggest to the CTA to implement the recommendations made in 2.2.2. These regulations, once enacted and strongly enforced would effect real change. We believe that by working together, we can achieve greater ***Awareness, Advocacy, and Access*** for all persons with disabilities, and not just hard of hearing consumers, which we are representing today.

In closing, we thank you once again, for allowing our association to make this presentation today. We hope that you will enjoy your short stay in our fair city and that you will come again. As you approach the end of a long road with this review panel, we wish you every success with your final report. We will look forward to reading your final recommendations. We would be pleased to answer your questions, should you have any. Thank you !