



# Hearing Aid Telecoil and Loop Update

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While excitement builds around Bluetooth Auracast, telecoils and hearing loop systems are alive and well, giving people with hearing aids and cochlear implants access to vital information—today.

With the advent of [Auracast™](#), Bluetooth's® new broadcast audio assistive listening vehicle, there is speculation that hearing loop technology is on its deathbed. Like Mark Twain's famous retort of similar reports back in 1897, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated," seems also to be the case with hearing loops.

Loop systems via telecoils dramatically increase the intelligibility of what is being said over public address (PA) systems and other large-area broadcasts, as the "speech to noise ratio" that's so important in hearing and understanding conversation is heavily weighted to speech as opposed to noise. User-friendly hearing loops are common in the United Kingdom, much of Western Europe, and Australasia. In the United States, they are increasingly found in theaters, places of worship, and other areas where people with hearing loss can expect to have difficulty hearing.

Below is a random sampling of some recent news stories here and abroad that demonstrate hearing loops are alive and well and becoming more prevalent daily.

## **US hearing loop installations**

Some installations, like one earlier this year in the [Kansas City Convention](#) Center that served an audience of 3,000, are temporary. Others, like the planned [installation](#) at ticket counters in 85 of the country's Amtrak stations are (or will be) permanent. Further, those

stations will be visited by the passenger cars of 83 new looped [Amtrak trains](#) now being built. Over 100 more have been optioned.

Additionally, soon-to-be-delivered looped subway cars in New York City, and new accessibility requirements for airports, train, bus, and ferry terminals in that city are harbingers of the increased use of hearing loops in the [transportation](#) industry in this country. The Port Authorities of New York and New Jersey continue to implement their new policy of loops in their terminals. They have added three more airports and the midtown Manhattan bus terminal to the list of facilities with hearing loops at their information counters.

[Lane County, Ore.](#) is one of the hotbeds for hearing loop adoption. Travel Lane County received a national award for installing 40 hearing loops throughout the county, with many more planned. Meanwhile, Travel Oregon is looping all of its information kiosks around the state. Oregon is also the home of the new [Center for Hearing Access](#) at The Shedd Institute, a nonprofit whose national mission is to pursue the understanding and adoption of those principles, practices, designs, and technologies that best realize a world in which seamless and simple hearing access is available to everyone with hearing loss.

Medina County, Ohio, is another example. The county commission there recently [approved](#) the installation of two new hearing loops in the courthouse to supplement existing ones. Further, the county's Office for Older Adults reported that \$30,000 from a grant has been set aside to install hearing loop systems in several other county facilities. These will join other venues in the county like the [Medina District Library](#), where part of a \$20,000 grant from the American Library Association (ALA) was used to install a hearing loop.

In San Antonio, a [new Morgan's Hotel](#) is being built near the Morgan's Wonderland theme park. The hotel has been designed to provide special accommodations for people with disabilities. This includes hearing loops and other features that far exceed the standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act.

### **International loop installations**

As in the US, the pace of loop installation abroad has not slackened, particularly in Australia's transportation sector. Hearing loops are part of the Agil Passenger Information System in the new six-car passenger trains planned for the state of Queensland. That state's Department of Transport's [Train Manufacturing Program](#) has ordered the design and delivery of 65 of those trains.

Meanwhile, in the state of Victoria, Melbourne is getting 25 new ultra-modern trains called X'Trapolis 2.0, which will cost almost \$1 billion and feature hearing loops in the passenger

cars. The country's [Ambassador Cruise Line](#) has recently included hearing loop technology in two of its ships, the Ambience and Ambition, with infrared assistive listening systems installed. Guests can access the system by borrowing either a headset or an induction neck loop.

In Spain, [taxicabs](#) have been looped. A new law in Madrid requires that every new taxi be equipped with a hearing loop. Now, all of the city's existing cabs are being retrofitted with hearing loops, making Madrid comparable to London, where that act took place over 30 years ago.

In Scotland, the University of Aberdeen has installed loops throughout the campus and just recently they have compiled a [list of hearing loops accessible to students and the public](#). Elsewhere in the UK, Yorkshire's bus operator [Transdev](#), announced plans to install hearing loop technology in more than 60 of its buses. Also, all new buses on order for delivery this year are to be looped.

### **Loop systems ensure better accessibility—today!**

A significant portion of those with hearing loss have telecoil-equipped hearing aids that give them access to hearing loops like those described above. It's believed that it could be five or more years before the majority of those hearing aids have been replaced with hearing aids (possibly still equipped with telecoils) capable of connecting to assistive listening systems using Bluetooth's Auracast broadcast audio technology. It will be some time after that before most, if not all, prescription hearing aids contain the ability to access Auracast. Consequently, it's expected that the current pace in the installation of hearing loops will not slacken for a good many years.

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Steve O. Frazier received his formal training as a Hearing Loss Support Specialist from the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA) and has more than 20 years of experience providing support and advocacy for those with hearing loss as a chapter and state HLAA leader. He chairs the Loop New Mexico initiative and is a member of HLAA's national Get in the Hearing Loop campaign task force, and sits on the New Mexico Speech-Language Pathology, Audiology and Hearing Aid Dispensing Practices Board. Contact him at [loopnm@gmail.com](mailto:loopnm@gmail.com).