



Google Gets in the Loop

A national data base of looped venues has been a goal of hearing loop advocates for years and it's finally becoming a reality.

Through the joint efforts of Google Maps and the Get in the Hearing Loop (GITHL) committee of the Hearing Loss Association of America, the presence of hearing loops is in the process of being added to the accessibility features category of venues listed on Google Maps. Thousands of listings for venues that offer hearing loop access have already been updated with the information and the process is ongoing.

Using a computer, people questioning whether a venue has a hearing loop can go to Google Maps, simply enter the name of a venue such as the "Richard Rodgers Theatre in New York City," and you will be taken to a street map showing the exact location of the venue . A box to the left of the map contains information such as the phone number, the street address and, sometimes, much more. In that space, directly below a row of blue circular icons, is a brief description of the venue with a "continued arrow" link like this > on it. Click on that link and you'll find Assistive hearing loop (if one is present) plus other applicable accessibility information pertaining to wheel chair access or other disability related accommodations. Go to the Phoenix Sky Harbor Airport listing and you'll find even more such accessibility Information. Using an app with a smartphone or tablet, the information is found by clicking on "about."

This is an ongoing project so, although all 12,000+ seats are looped, there's not yet a listing for the Breslin Center at Michigan State University or many other venues you may be aware of. Further, these listings are interactive so you can lend a hand in maintaining their integrity.

At a venue's Google listing you will find a "suggest an edit" link or, with the app, an individual can click "update this place". There are also links to add a photo or to post a review. If you find mention of the loop missing on a venue you know to be looped, send an email to loop.locations@hearingloss.org to let the GITHL committee know.

This is an especially good opportunity for hearing loop installers to share the list of their installations with the rest of the country and their contact information with the GITHL committee so that, should the time come that the group mounts a national loop installer database for potential clients to access, the committee will have your contact information.

Installers and others should use his online form to provide the committee with the needed information to update the listing for a venue or to add listings to the Google site. The

questionnaire will take approximately 3 minutes to complete. If you have several places you'd like to add at one time please email all of the information called for in the online form (hearingloss.org/HearingLoopLocations) to: loop.locations@hearingloss.org and the information you provided will be considered for submission to Google Maps.

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Phoenix Sky Harbor expands hearing loop program

...we're committed to providing all of our customers with the best-possible experience.

Following the initial installation of hearing loops at departure gates elsewhere in the terminal some time ago, Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport recently included hearing loops in renovated areas of Terminal 3 and in the newly added Terminal 4's Eighth Concourse, to help hearing-aid users with airport announcements and the overhead paging system. The new, state-of-the-art eight gate concourse is solely occupied by Southwest Airlines. The 275,000 square foot space features a variety of customer amenities, including access to charging stations in every seat, an Animal Relief Area, Family Restroom, Nursing Room, and hearing loop connectivity which will allow those with hearing devices to connect directly and wirelessly to the PA system. Phoenix Sky Harbor also provides a sensory room for individuals with autism, dementia or other sensory-related conditions.

Chad Makovsky, director of aviation services at Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, said, "At Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport, we're committed to providing all of our customers with the best-possible experience, which includes making sure accessibility is a top priority. I hope that with the addition of Aira service, our passengers will be empowered to travel the way they want when they choose Sky Harbor."

As was the case with the earlier Sky Harbor loop installations, the loops in the new Southwest concourse were the work of the Hearing Loop Systems Division of Parkway Electric and Communications LLC of Holland, MI.

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Austin, TX Airport Expanding Loop Availability

The Austin-Bergstrom International Airport in Texas installed hearing loops at 12 gates four years ago. Thanks to a grant of \$15 million from the federal government's billion dollar infrastructure plan, more gates will now be looped in Austin. The federal money will funnel to

85 airports in the country to modernize and expand terminals and increase energy efficiency, among other projects. For Austin the \$15 million will go toward expanding capacity to prepare the airport to eventually transition from a medium hub to a large hub, according to a release from the White House.

Among the projects to be funded are:

Hearing loops to help hard of hearing travelers

Wayfinding, a system that guides people through a space

Multi-lingual assistance

Assistive care restrooms

ADA compliance throughout the terminal

Also on the list of projects for AUS is installing energy-efficient systems, glass tinting and using sustainable energy construction, the White House said.

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Hearing loops in Russia

Russia has a notoriously high incidence of hearing loss - nearly twice as high as in the US

The availability of hearing loops in Russia is just another indication that this is an international technology, accessible in any country for travelers from any other country. Hearing aids made in Denmark, sold in Denver and worn in Dudinka, Russia by an American tourist visiting Dudinka, Russia work well with the induction loop systems found there.

The latest major installation of hearing loop technology there is in the Moscow subway. Playing catch up with New York City and San Francisco, the Mayor of Moscow has reported that hearing loops have just been installed at the ticket offices for 12 of the city's Metro stations and that, by the end of 2022, installation will be complete at all 250 stations of the Moscow Metro. Loops for various purposes have also been installed at all three of Moscow's international airports and Aeroexpress, the company that provides passenger rail service to and between those airports, has equipped their ticket offices with induction loop systems.

Like most European countries, hearing loops can be found throughout Russia. Examples are the Triumph Sports Complex in Kazan in Tatarstan and the Kazan Circus where loop systems enable hearing impaired children and adults to enjoy the performances. About 300 healthcare, sports, educational and cultural institutions of Tatarstan alone are now equipped with induction loop systems. Tartarstan was one of three regions in which a pilot project was undertaken after the

creation of the Barrier-Free Environment Project (BFEP) for people with disabilities and reduced mobility was launched in 2007. The program is aimed at bringing improvement in seven key sectors in the country: education, healthcare, culture, transport, information and communications, sports and physical education, and housing facilities. The implementation of this program has resulted in the creation of an environment in which any person with any disabilities could easily move from place to place without any hindrances, get any services needed and, in general, live a full-fledged life.

In preparation for hosting the 2014 Paralympic Winter Games over 1,000 city infrastructure facilities in the city of Sochi were inspected to ensure they met the barrier free standards of the BFEP. This resulted in the modification of many reception desks to be equipped with hearing loops to serve the needs of those with a hearing disability. Russia has a notoriously high incidence of hearing loss - nearly twice as high as in the US according to some sources -.so such accommodations benefit a substantial portion of the public.

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Oregon grocery store promotes hearing loops

*They can practice activating their telecoils
until they are comfortable with the procedure.*

Back in February the Springfield, OR Grocery Outlet, in cooperation with the Loop Lane County Committee, introduced hearing loop systems at every checkout stand and store management reports that community support and appreciation has been "amazing". They found, however, that people with telecoil capable hearing aids were not always familiar with the process of turning on their telecoils or comfortable doing so in public.

To help T-switch reticent customers become more comfortable with the process, the Committee has now created a resource center in the store where people can sit down in a low key, no pressure spot, and practice using the telecoil program in their hearing aids. To simplify the process, a hearing loop installed in the resource center has been modified to continuously play a message, allowing a user to confirm that their devices are in the telecoil mode when they activate their T-switch. They can practice activating their telecoils until they are comfortable with the procedure.

The semi private area set aside for this use also has a supply of literature on matters of interest to people with hearing loss and those close to them.

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FDA's Final OTC Hearing Aid Rule Moves to OMB

On July 8, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) announced that it had received the FDA's final rule for Over-the-Counter (OTC) hearing aids. Speculatively, judging by past actions, this could suggest an early September publication of the final rules by the FDA, followed by an October publication of the rules in the Federal Register.

Looping advocates came out in numbers to support requiring telecoils in OTC hearing aids when the FDA was accepting comments on their proposed rules. They also recommended that the packaging call attention to the presence or absence of telecoils contained in the package and that detailed instructions for telecoil use be included with any devices that feature the technology. It remains to be seen how, if at all, the FDA responds to those entreaties.

Meanwhile, Senators Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., and Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, sponsors of the bill that mandated OTC hearing aids, have doubled down on their campaign to get final FDA approval of the rules so that retail sales of the less expensive OTC variety of hearing aids can commence. A letter from the bi-partisan duo to the FDA commissioner accused the FDA of undermining that agency's proposed rule. The senators accused hearing-aid manufacturers of launching a disinformation campaign via two form letters found in submitted comments to the FDA's proposed rule. The two letters accounted for roughly 40% of the comments received by the agency.

Warren and Grassley wrote, "Powerful stakeholders, including dominant manufacturers in the highly-concentrated hearing aid industry, are using astroturf lobbying tactics to weaken the FDA's proposed rule" and said they wanted to "expand access, reduce costs, and ensure a robust new market for safe and effective OTC hearing aids." They accused the manufacturing lobby of "harming American consumers."

The proposed FDA rule solicited over a thousand comments with many hearing care professionals supporting the draft rules as written while others took exception to some of them, particularly those related to maximum output level and the proposed gain limit set in the proposal.

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NOTE TO READERS:

If you would like to have your name removed from the mailing list used to circulate In The Loop, please send an email to the sending address of this edition of the newsletter and you will be removed.

If you are aware of a newsworthy story regarding hearing loops, neckloops or telecoils and would like to have it considered for publication in a future edition of this newsletter, please send the details to: intheloop@juno.com.

Submissions are welcome from any of the private individuals, hearing care providers or looping advocates in addition to loop installers, distributors and manufacturers receiving this newsletter.

If a friend or associate forwarded this newsletter to you and you would like to be added to the mailing list for future copies, send your request to the address above and you'll be in the loop.

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