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Auracast has arrived!

...in the case of one brand, they're available on Amazon.

Auracast™ is no longer only discussed in the future tense. There are now products on the market that use this newest Bluetooth® technology. Meanwhile, speculation regarding the impact of Auracast on the future of hearing loop systems is that this time-tested assistive listening technology has at least ten years before it may no longer be the preferred means of communication access in large public venues and is supplanted by Auracast. In the interim, many expect the two systems to run in tandem for many years as hearing aid wearers make the five to ten year transition to new hearing aids.

Two companies from Taiwan have now marketed Auracast transceivers that both send and receive this newest version of Bluetooth® LE Broadcast Audio. They're small, they're relatively inexpensive, they really work, and in the case of one brand, they're available on Amazon. Plus a mic or other electronic sound source in one transceiver in send mode and it will broadcast to as many transceivers in receive mode you have available to power speakers, ear buds, neckloops (with some signal strength problems).

These transceivers are the first step down the long path to an assistive listening technology that will be easily accessible all - the hard of hearing and the yearning at very little cost to the provider of the system. It will serve not just wearers of specially equipped hearing aids but, rather, anyone with hearing aids, a smartphone, earbuds, earphones or some other devices that are Auracast capable. That device could be something as simple and inexpensive as a VOCE transceiver (\$62.99) and a pair of sired earbuds (\$29.99) from Amazon or, when on the market, Auracast earbuds (\$49.99 gestimated).

Read about my test of the VOCE transceivers [HERE](#).

Colorado Springs airport getting in the loop

... upgrades involve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerns that will include hearing loops as an integral part of the terminal's public address system.

The distance and accessibility of the busy Denver airport from that city's southern suburbs has resulted in many of those suburbanites looking south to Colorado Springs when considering air travel. Easier to get to and easier to get through, the Colorado Springs Municipal Airport (COS) will soon be even more inviting for those suburbanites and especially so if they have a hearing loss.

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has awarded a \$6 million grant for the Airport's upcoming Concourse Modernization project. The project will be a complete remodel of the terminal concourse to include hold rooms, restrooms, ceilings, windows, elevators, flooring, the PA system, and more. The modernization will increase terminal sustainability and improve accessibility for individuals with disabilities. With an eye for traveler comfort and convenience, many upgrades involve Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) concerns that will include hearing loops as an integral part of the terminal's public address system.

On March 1 the Colorado Springs Gazette reported Greg Phillips, Director of Aviation as saying, "The existing terminal opened in 1994 and has served our travelers well through the years, but it's time and we're excited for these upgrades. We want to continue to improve our travelers' experience and ensure their time at COS is stress-free, comfortable, and supports their travel needs." The improvements are intended to increase the airport's passenger capacity in the concourse along with increase traffic levels that will result.

Albuquerque Sunport may follow

After two meetings with local hearing loop advocates, management at Albuquerque, New Mexico's Sunport have begun exploring options for the introduction of hearing loop technology that city's unique southwestern influenced terminal. Options being looked at include looping departure gates, counter loops at information and other service counters and various other applications of the technology that are already in use in twenty US airports that include such major hub airports as those of Phoenix, Atlanta and Minneapolis/St. Paul.

The Sunport was another of the airports receiving grants from the FAA and looping advocates are hopeful that a portion of those funds can be devoted to improving communication access for the hard of hearing in the terminal.

List of known airports using hearing loop technology

The summer travel season is fast approaching and a growing number of airports have been added to the Loop NM list of such facilities. See the following for the still growing list...

Arizona

Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport - Terminal 3: All departure gates, Terminal 4*: Departure gates.

California

Los Angeles International Airport - Consolidated Rent-A-Car Facility*

Colorado

Colorado Springs Municipal Airport - Departure gates*

Florida

Sarasota-Bradenton Airport - All departure gates

Georgia

Atlanta Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport - Information booths, testing at some Delta departure gates.

Indiana

Fort Wayne International Airport - Departure gates*

South Bend International Airport - Some departure gates

Michigan

Detroit Metropolitan Wayne County Airport - Delta Airlines departure gates

Grand Rapids, Gerald R. Ford International Airport - Departure gates, concourse

Kalamazoo, Kalamazoo/Battle Creek International Airport - Ticket counters, arrivals area, departure gates.

Muskegon County Airport - Departure gates

Minnesota

Minneapolis- St Paul International Airport - Terminal 1: Baggage claim, some gate areas, international arrivals area, rest area, information desks. Terminal 2*: departure gates.

Montana

Billings Logan International Airport - Departure gates*

New York

NYC (Queens), LaGuardia Airport - All departure gates in Delta Airlines terminal

Rochester, Greater Rochester International Airport - Departure gates, airline and car rental counters, food and beverage concessions.

Syracuse Hancock International Airport - Airline and car rental counters

Oregon

Eugene Airport - Car rental and ticket counters looped, gates pending*

Tennessee

Memphis International Airport - Concourse, departure gates

Texas

Austin-Bergstrom International Airport - 12 departure gates looped, more in progress

Washington

Seattle-Tacoma International Airport - Alaska Airlines, Delta Air Lines and Jet Blue ticketing and service counters, gates and baggage claim.

Wisconsin

Oshkosh, Wittman Regional Airport - Departure gates

* Indicates work in progress

News you can use

No Telecoils? No Problem

That device's telecoil will pick up the electromagnetic signal of a hearing loop and relay it to the user's Bluetooth enabled hearing aids.

Far too many people with hearing loss only learn about telecoils and hearing loops after they have already purchased hearing aids. They may visit a performing arts hall, a place of worship, or an HLAA chapter meeting and learn that the venue has a hearing loop and how it interacts with hearing aids. Then they learn, after a query to their hearing care provider, that the hearing aids they were recently sold do not have that particular feature. In the past this was a bummer but, for some, things have changed.

There are now remote microphones for hearing aids that can be placed on the lapel of your dinner companion, placed at the far end of a long conference table, or placed at the podium or on the lapel of a lecturer. They pick up sound and transmit it via Bluetooth® to the user's hearing aids, bringing distant sounds as strong and clear as if they're coming from three feet away. This is only the first feature some of these devices now offer. Several of the more advanced models contain a telecoil in addition to the mic so they serve double duty. That device's telecoil will pick up the electromagnetic signal of a hearing loop and relay it to the user's Bluetooth enabled hearing aids.

ADDITIONAL FEATURES

To add frosting to the cake, some of these mics will perform the same function with an FM or IR assistive listening system (ALS), tripling the functionality of the hearing aids. For some of these devices, the useful features don't stop here – they go on to perform some of the functions of a standard remote control that will turn the hearing aids on or off, raise or lower the volume, change from one memory to another and more. Information on each of them is available on the applicable website but it is not always as complete or accessible as one might want and, often, training videos are not captioned.

EXAMPLES

Resound Multi Mic - This remote hearing aid microphone offers users a small, flexible solution that allows them to hear from up to 80 feet away (according to Resound) without having to wear any sort of extra devices around the neck.

Alternatively, the mic can be placed horizontally on a table or other level surface and it will automatically switch to a mode optimized to pick up the voices of multiple speakers. For one-on-one situations it can be clipped vertically onto the clothing of another person nearby and make their voice stronger than it would be using just the mics in your hearing aids. ReSound says this holds true even in background noise.

The Multi Mic also connects to hearing loop and FM systems and additional flexibility is available by using its mini-jack input to connect directly to virtually any device with a headphone jack such as the receiver for an FM or IR ALS. Again, the mic streams that sound to the user's hearing aids via Bluetooth. It takes 3 hours to fully charge a discharged Multi Mic but information on the hours of use before recharging is required did not seem to be available. The Resound Multi Mic can be found online for prices ranging from \$249 to \$410.

Widex Sound Assist - This multi-function accessory is intended to improve communication in a variety of situations. Compact and lightweight, the Sound Assist offers six different functions to help the end user hear optimally in any complex environment or situation where noise could hinder understanding.

In the partner microphone mode, one-to-one conversations sound clearer than using just the mics in the hearing aids in many settings. Used as a table mic the user can hear better at important meetings, dinner parties and in group conversations. Hands free phone calls are possible using this device and, in the streaming mode, audio can be streamed from a connected Bluetooth device to your hearing aids. The telecoil mode allows the user to connect to the signal from a hearing loop even though the hearing aids do not, themselves, contain such coils. The device also functions as a remote control to make adjustment to the sound from partnered hearing aids.

The Sound Assist mic has a run time of 10 hours and takes 3 hours to recharge its Lithium-ion battery. List price is \$499 but they can be found online for as little as \$349.

Starkey Remote Microphone + – This microphone is the larger and more versatile of the two personal mics in Starkey's 2.4GHz wireless accessory range. Like the smaller Mini Remote mic, it can be clipped to the clothing of your conversation partner to pick up his or her voice and send it wirelessly to various Starkey hearing aids. It can also double as a TV listening device and functions as an assistive listening device for one-to-one conversation in a noisy environment like a restaurant. When worn by someone, the microphone will automatically prioritize sound from directly above while reducing sound from other directions. The Remote+ microphone can also be placed flat on a table for use in quieter group conversations where it will pick up sound from all directions.

The Remote Microphone+ can pair with up to 8 different Bluetooth devices so it can be used for hands free phone calls or listening to media from a variety of sources streamed directly to hearing aids. In addition, using its self-contained telecoil to receive a loop signal, it can also stream that sound to most Starkey hearing aids. It will also stream the sound from an FM assistive listening system using either a 3.5mm jack plugged into a receiver for the ALS or by using a European jack plugged into the transmitter for the ALS. Compatible Starkey hearing aids include several Evolv and Livio models in addition to the brand-new Genesis line. A visit to the Starkey website will find a list of all compatible Starkey models.

The Remote Plus can stream for up to 10 hours on a full charge and requires 3 hours to fully recharge. An LED status indicator will blink red accompanied by an audible tone in your hearing aids every 5

minutes when the battery is low. The Remote Plus can be found online for anywhere from \$375.00 to \$545.00

Oticon EduMic - Unlike the other mics reviewed here, the MultiConnect EduMic can be connected to an unlimited number of paired Oticon 2.4 GHz enabled hearing aids at the same time, allowing for several users in the same room. Target users were students in the mic's development thus the EduMic name but education doesn't stop when you graduate.

EduMic is always ready to pair. Once hearing aids are in pairing mode and within 20 cm (7-8 inches), EduMic will automatically pair and connect to them. It will automatically connect with hearing aids within a 20 m (65 ft.) range by initiating a program change in the hearing aid. This way, hearing aids can connect to EduMic without using the hearing aid push button. Audio from a 3.5 mm jack connection is also possible and streamed directly in stereo to all hearing aids. Through the FM/DAI connection and the telecoil, EduMic will stream sound from classroom microphone and teleloop systems respectively.

Charging time for full charging is 2.5 hours. When the power indicator flashes RED, there is approximately 2 hours of battery life remaining and a quick 30-minute charge during a break provides approximately 2.5 hours of use.

This is the most expensive of the mics explored and will retail for as much as \$1,100.00 but an online search found it available for \$586.90 at one source.

Beltone MyPal Pro - Like its sister device, the ReSound mic, this remote unit will stream not only sound picked up by its microphone but sound emanating from a hearing loop or FM assistive listening system. For microphone use it has a directional mic for clear, crisp sound that will not "hear" some of the background noise emanating from other directions. It features its own volume control and mute functions and, should it be dropped from a height of 30 inches or more, it will automatically mute the sound transmission. Its visual status indicators let you keep an eye on the current status and mode of operation. It has a battery life of 10 hours and the price at various offices online is \$400.00

The MyPAL Pro is compatible with the following Beltone hearing aids:

- Beltone [Imagine](#)
- Beltone [Amaze](#)
- Beltone [Rely](#)
- Beltone [Boost Ultra](#)

WORTH NOTING

These devices are pricey but invaluable to those where hearing well is a priority. An online search for any will find them available at a variety of prices and unlike buying hearing aids that need to be adjusted for each individual, there's no sort of service needed other than possibly to charge the mic when it arrives.

Like many higher priced electronic devices, some people will buy, try and then sell those they find don't meet their needs or their expectations. When this happens, many of them end up on eBay. At the time this article was being written there were two Starkey Remote+ mics for sale there – one for \$39.99 that had a broken clip but the one for \$69.99 was reported to be in good working condition.

For those whose hearing aids don't have telecoils, these mics are the solution to that shortcoming. Even owners of telecoil equipped hearing aids, though, will find some of the added capabilities of these devices to be well worth their price.

OTC hearing aids are here...telecoils are not

Anyone wanting telecoils in their hearing aids will be disappointed when visiting a store – they're apparently not going to be there.

When the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) released their rules for over-the-counter (OTC) hearing aids in August 2022, it was certainly not much ado about nothing. Instead, it was an earthquake in the hearing aid and hearing care industries. It affects not just OTC hearing aids but also prescription hearing aids. It legalized the sale of medical grade hearing aids by a pharmacist at Walgreens or a "blue shirt" at Best Buy. You can now buy hearing aids at some Verizon stores while buying the phone used to adjust their settings. The new rules created confusion in regard to the preemption of state laws governing the dispensing of hearing aids and the subsequent impact on both prescribers and the state boards that license them that remain to be fully resolved.

Telecoils

The first thing you learn when you visit any of the retailers (Walmart, Walgreens, Verizon etc.) supposedly selling hearing aids over the counter is that those hearing aids don't offer telecoils. Currently the only devices being offered OTC that have telecoils are the Lexie Lumen, sold by Walgreens and available online from Best Buy. Most of the other models on offer are small, in the ear styles rather than behind the ear. Most of what's on offer OTC or online were previously available online and still are. New, telecoils equipped models are reportedly in the pipeline from various manufacturers but don't be surprised if they don't materialize. OTC hearing aid sales don't appear to have hurt the sale of prescription devices. So far in 2023, sales reported by the Hearing Industries Association (HIA) have been up over 9% over last years but OTC sales by HIA members account for only 1% of their business.

Where can you buy them?

Hearing aids are now available over-the-counter but only some counters and not even the businesses selling them seem to know which counters those are. Expected by many to be in the pharmacy area of all Walmart stores, the company has, instead, placed them in their Vision Centers and opening day media reports said they would only be in stores in some states. They're not really available over the counter though - all you may find is a sign and a plastic holder of brochures telling you how to order the devices.

At Verizon there's a sign and even earphones to use for a hearing test. Once you take the test, if it shows a measurable hearing loss, you will be put in touch with Eargo to follow up and, possibly, mail order a pair of their hearing aids.

Let Google help you pick tourist sites

There are times and places where it would simply be impossible to take in all the sites of interest that you could visit so it's a good idea to visit those that offer hearing loops in one form or another to ensure you can hear when you get there. The new loop listings on Google Maps can help you find them.

If, for example, you're planning a sojourn to New York City, by checking out the airports you'll find only LaGuardia currently offers hearing loops as an accommodation for those with telecoil equipped hearing aids or CIs. Check out the Broadway theaters with shows you might want to attend and, by putting in the name of the theater and then clicking on "about" you'll learn if the theater has a hearing loop installed or whether you may need to borrow a receiver and neckloop at the box office. Each NYC museum that features loop technology can be identified in the same way as can other popular sports and entertainment sites.

Hats off to the hard working Get in the Hearing Loop (GITHL) committee at HLAA for this latest of their many tools and efforts to improve communication access in America through Audio Frequency Induction Loop Systems (AFILS).

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

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 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 the email address below:

intheloop@juno.com

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