FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE   **PRESS RELEASE**

Media Contact: Terrie Prosper, 415.703.1366, news@cpuc.ca.gov

CPUC FIRST IN NATION TO PROVIDE VISUALLY ASSISTED SPEECH-TO-SPEECH SERVICE THROUGH DEAF AND DISABLED TELECOMMUNICATIONS PROGRAM

SAN FRANCISCO, May 1, 2012 - The California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC), through its Deaf and Disabled Telecommunications Program (DDTP), today launched a visual component to its Speech-to-Speech service in order to make placing assisted calls easier and faster for customers. This visual component to California's Speech-to-Speech service is the first of its kind in the U.S.

Speech-to-Speech service enables a person whose speech is difficult for others to understand to communicate by telephone with the help of a Communications Assistant, who remains on the line to assist during the call. With a Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech call, in addition to a basic phone call to the relay service, the Speech-to-Speech caller is also using a webcam or videophone with Skype™ to connect with the Communications Assistant at a relay call center. This enables the Communications Assistant to see the Speech-to-Speech user as they are speaking. Seeing the Speech-to-Speech caller's mouth movements, facial expressions, and gestures, and possibly even cue cards (e.g., yes, no) can enable the Communications Assistant to better understand and re-voice for the caller. Users of Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices can also share the information they are typing via Skype™, using computer emulation.

The CPUC worked closely with DDTP's Speech-to-Speech users and its relay providers, Hamilton Relay and AT&T Relay, to develop the Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech service. Speech-to-Speech users need the following to use Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech:

- A computer (PC or Apple®) with a webcam or comparable equipment to access the video service;

- A telephone near the video device for the voice connection to the Visually Assisted Speech-to-Speech Communications Assistant (a device with a speakerphone is recommended);

- Access to high-speed Internet with a minimum bandwidth of 256k upload/download speed (see the Skype™ website for specific system requirements and bandwidth requirements to make Skype™ video calls); and,

- The ability to operate the equipment (independently or with assistance).

The DDTP is a program of the CPUC, providing Californians who are deaf and disabled with specialized telephone equipment and relay services through the California Telephone Access Program and California Relay Service, respectively. Speech-to-Speech is a part of the California Relay Service. The Program serves people who are challenged using a standard telephone because of difficulty seeing, hearing, speaking, moving, or remembering.

For more information on the DDTP, please visit www.ddtp.org.

For more information on the CPUC, please visit www.cpuc.ca.gov.

****
Terrie Prosper
Director, News & Public Information Office
California Public Utilities Commission
Visit the CPUC on: Twitter | Facebook