

Read all the fine print in the card's terms and conditions to find out about any extra charges. You may be charged activation fees or periodic "maintenance" fees for a calling card. Some cards advertise rates as low as 1 cent per minute, but you may have to pay a connection fee each time you use the card. These charges increase the actual cost of a call. For example, a card may charge 2.9 cents per minute for a state-to-state call, with a 70 cent per call connection fee. This makes the cost of a three minute long distance call 79 cents, or more than 26 cents per minute.

Tip:

While you can use a calling card from any telephone, surcharges apply on calls from pay phones and hotels. Find out what the surcharges are before you use the card. Also, calls to cell phones from calling cards are usually billed at much higher rates.

Wireless

If you have a cellular phone, you may be able to use your wireless service provider for your long distance calls.

Wireless companies usually offer a block of minutes for one monthly rate. Many plans charge the same rate for local or long distance calls in a specified region on the wireless company's network. The rates, which average around 12 cents per minute, are competitive with many calling plans offered by long distance companies.

Be aware that the advertised "coast to coast" or national plans exclude many locations. Make sure the plan covers where you will make and receive most of your calls. Calls outside the service area can cost a lot extra or may not connect.

People who care about reducing their monthly telephone bills should make sure they have a long distance plan that provides the best deal for them!

Are you paying too much for long distance telephone service?

Dial 1?

Dial Around?

Calling Card?

Wireless?

A consumer's guide from the
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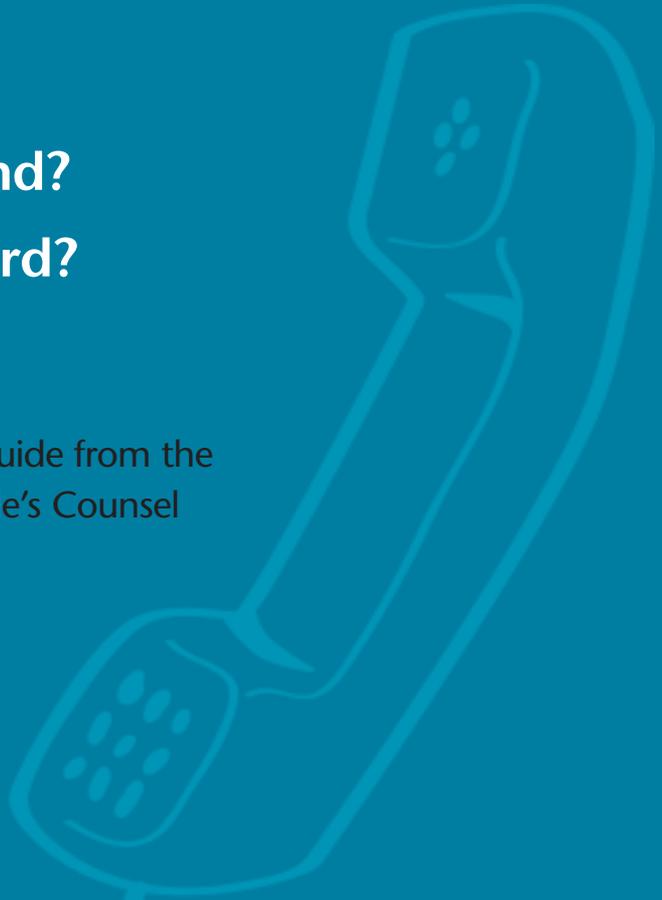
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Many Maryland consumers are paying too much for their state-to-state long distance telephone service.

Long distance telephone companies offer a wide range of calling plans, yet about half of AT&T's long distance customers nationwide still pay the high basic long distance rate:*

Weekdays

39¢ per minute

Weeknights

32.5¢ per minute

Weekends

20.5¢ per minute

*As of June 1, 2002



Dial arounds

Dial arounds are those heavily advertised 10-10 telephone numbers that allow consumers to "dial around" from home without subscribing to a specific long distance company. A caller dials the 10-10 number and then the number they wish to call. The charges appear on your telephone or credit card bill, depending on the provider. You usually cannot use dial arounds from pay phones or hotels.

Before using a dial around service, find out from the provider if you will be charged any connection fees, monthly fees or service charges.

Dial arounds may also charge a flat rate for calls up to a specified length of time. This means that you will pay the same for a very short call as for a long call. For example, if you make a one-minute call using 10-10-220, which charges 99 cents for 20 minutes or less, you will be charged 99 cents for your one-minute call.

Tip:

Always check and make sure you have the best rate for any long distance plan that you use. Some companies keep billing current customers at the old, higher rates when they introduce a cheaper plan.

Calling cards

Because you can use calling cards from pay phones and hotels, they are convenient for travel. You dial an 800 number and personal identification code to connect to the long distance provider, and receive a monthly bill just like regular long distance service.

A number of telephone companies now offer prepaid calling cards, where you pay in advance for a specific amount of calling time. You can also buy these cards at local stores and even the post office. Prepaid cards can help consumers budget their long distance spending.

Another Dial 1 plan might be a better deal if a customer makes a lot of long distance calls.

Example 2. A customer makes 300 minutes of daytime state-to-state long distance calls in a month:

Plan	Usage Charge 300 minutes	Minimum Usage or Fee	Total Cost**
AT&T Basic 39¢*	\$117.00	--	\$117.00
AT&T 10¢	\$30.00	\$5.00 minimum	\$30.00
Sprint 5¢	\$15.00	\$8.95	\$23.95
MCI 200	\$7.00	\$9.95	\$16.95

*Daytime rate. Weekend and evening rates are lower.

** Does not include taxes or surcharges.

In this example, the cheapest plan for a consumer who talks for 300 minutes per month — five hours — is the MCI 200 plan.

Tip: Rates for international calls under your long distance plan may be a lot more expensive than domestic state-to-state calls. Shop around for an international calling plan with low rates to the countries you call most often.

Which plan is best for you?

Competition among long distance carriers means you can choose from many different plans.

To find the right plan, follow these steps:

1. Know your long distance calling patterns.

Look at your long distance telephone bills from the past few months. Add up the total long distance calling minutes each month. Note where you call most often and how many minutes you talk.

2. Get the facts. Find out what plan you currently use and learn what other long distance options are available in your state.

Long distance companies have a variety of calling plans, so you may not have to change companies to save money. Companies may not promote all of their plans. If you can't find the information you need in the company's advertising or on its web site, contact a company customer service representative.

Keep pushing buttons and stay on the line until you reach a real person so you can ask questions and get answers!

Tip:

Rates are usually highest during weekdays before 7 pm. Most companies offer special plans for weekend and evening calls. Calling during those "off-peak" periods can save you money.

3. Compare options.

Select the best plan for your needs. The basic options are:

Dial 1. You sign up with a long distance provider for calls from your home telephone. You dial 1 and the number you are calling.

Dial around. You don't need to sign up in advance. You dial the seven digit code for the provider that you choose, and the number you are calling. These are also known as "10-10" services.

Calling card. You dial a toll-free number to connect with the provider. Many companies offer prepaid calling cards. Once you purchase the card, long distance charges are deducted each time you make a call.

Wireless. You use your cellular telephone to make long distance calls.

Dial 1 Plans

Here are some examples of Dial 1 state-to-state long distance plans that are cheaper than AT&T's basic rates.

Note: The plans in this brochure are subject to change. Contact the long distance company for the most current rates.

AT&T offers a rate of 10 cents per minute for all calls dialed from home, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week with no monthly fee. There is a \$5.00 minimum charge each month.

Sprint has a 5 cent per minute plan with a fee of \$8.95 per month.

MCI offers a "block of time" plan of 200 minutes for \$9.95 per month, and 7 cents per minute for additional minutes.*

There are many other long distance service providers offering lower rates, so be sure to shop around.

Some companies now offer unlimited plans, where you pay a flat monthly fee for an unlimited number of minutes of long distance calling. Check the plan details before signing up. Unlimited minutes may be restricted, for example, to other parties that also have the same long distance provider.

*MCI's parent company, WorldCom, is currently under federal investigation for accounting irregularities. Consumers should consider the financial situation of any long distance company before choosing a plan.

Confused?

Here's how to decide which plan is best for you.

The best way for consumers to understand what each plan will cost is to set up a comparison chart, using several typical monthly bills to supply the figures for a plan comparison.

Example 1: A customer who makes 30 minutes of daytime state-to-state calls in a month would be billed the following charges under various Dial 1 plans.

Plan	Usage Charge 30 minutes	Minimum Usage or Fee	Total Cost**
AT&T Basic 39¢*	\$11.70	--	\$11.70
AT&T 10¢	\$3.00	\$5.00 minimum	\$5.00
Sprint 5¢	\$1.50	\$8.95	\$10.45
MCI 200	--	\$9.95	\$9.95

*Daytime rate. Weekend and evening rates are lower.

** Does not include taxes or surcharges.

In this example the AT&T 10 cent plan is the cheapest option.

Tip:

If you make frequent long distance calls within your state, find a plan with low rates for in-state calls. Some plans advertise a low state-to-state rate, but charge much more for in-state calls.