



Telecom Decision CRTC 2011-451

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Ottawa, 28 July 2011

Area code relief for area codes 250, 604, and 778 in British Columbia

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In this decision, the Commission determines that area code relief for area codes 250, 604, and 778 in British Columbia is to be provided by a distributed overlay of new area code 236, effective 1 June 2013. The Commission also determines that area code 672 be set aside for future relief in British Columbia.

Introduction

1. On 14 September 2010, the Canadian Numbering Administrator informed the Commission that the results of a general numbering resource utilization forecast indicated that area codes 250, 604, and 778 in British Columbia would exhaust by August 2016.
2. The Commission subsequently issued *Establishment of a CISC ad hoc committee for relief planning for area codes 250, 604, and 778 in British Columbia*, Telecom Notice of Consultation CRTC 2010-815, 3 November 2010, in which it established a relief planning committee (RPC) to examine options for providing relief for area codes 250, 604, and 778 in British Columbia.
3. The most recent numbering resource utilization forecast, dated 28 April 2011, indicates that area codes 250, 604, and 778 will now exhaust by November 2014.

The RPC's submission

4. The RPC filed a planning document with the Commission, dated 30 May 2011. In this document, the RPC analyzed eight relief options for area codes 250, 604, and 778, including various options for area code overlay and boundary realignment, and made recommendations for area code relief.
5. Based on its analysis of the various relief options, the RPC recommended that
 - a) area code relief be provided by a distributed overlay of area codes 250, 604, and 778 (a province-wide overlay), with an effective date of 1 June 2013;
 - b) the proposed relief implementation schedule included in the planning document be approved; and
 - c) area code 236 be used as the first overlay area code.

6. The RPC noted that it did not reach a consensus on how the distributed overlay should be implemented. Bell Canada and TELUS Communications Company proposed that two area code overlays be implemented, such that once the first overlay area code (specifically, area code 236) is 90 percent used, the second overlay area code (specifically, area code 672) would be used. Rogers Communications Inc. proposed that only one overlay area code be implemented; however, the company was not opposed to setting aside a second area code for future use in British Columbia.
7. The Commission considers that the RPC's planning document raises the following issues:
 - I. What relief method should be used and when should it be implemented?
 - II. Which area code(s) should be used for relief?
 - III. What is the next step for relief implementation?

I. What relief method should be used and when should it be implemented?

8. The Commission notes that, with the exception of the area code boundary realignment option, all the relief options reviewed by the RPC relate to area code overlays. The Commission considers that area code overlays are preferable to boundary realignments since boundary realignments require a large number of customers to change their telephone numbers. The Commission also considers that, in this case, a distributed overlay is preferable to a concentrated overlay since a distributed overlay would be less confusing to subscribers who have become re-accustomed to province-wide area codes. Also, distributed overlays provide the most flexibility in meeting future demand.
9. The Commission notes that overlay area codes have previously been introduced in British Columbia, which means that 10-digit local dialing is already in place. As such, the Commission considers that the introduction of another overlay area code would present minimal issues with very minimal disruption to subscribers.
10. The Commission notes that area code relief should generally be in place 12 to 18 months before the area code exhausts, in accordance with the Canadian NPA (Numbering Plan Area) Relief Planning Guidelines. The Commission also notes that the RPC recommended a relief implementation date of 1 June 2013, which is 17 months before the projected exhaust date.
11. In light of the above, the Commission determines that relief for area codes 250, 604, and 778 be implemented using a distributed area code overlay, effective 1 June 2013.

II. Which area code(s) should be used for relief?

12. The Commission notes that the RPC did not reach a consensus on how the distributed area code overlay should be implemented in British Columbia.

Specifically, there was disagreement on how many area codes should be implemented at this time. The Commission notes that the addition of one area code would provide relief until 2021, while the addition of two area codes would provide relief until 2029.

13. The Commission considers that given the fluidity of numbering resource requirements across Canada, the volatility of recent numbering resource utilization forecasts, and the uncertainty of future demand and exhaust time frames, it would not be an efficient use of numbering resources to implement two new area codes in British Columbia. The Commission considers that the addition of one area code at this time would provide an acceptable relief period that is in accordance with the Canadian NPA Relief Planning Guidelines.¹ However, the Commission also considers that it would be appropriate for planning purposes to identify and set aside an area code for future relief in British Columbia.
14. The Commission considers that it is a good assignment practice to use an area code that has not been used as a central office code within the area to be served, or in areas adjacent to it, because this reduces the potential for customer confusion when dialing. Since area codes 236 and 672 both meet this criterion, the Commission determines that area code 236 is to be used for current area code relief and that, for planning purposes, area code 672 is to be set aside as the most suitable area code for future code relief in British Columbia.

III. What is the next step for relief implementation?

15. The Commission requests that the RPC file for Commission approval a relief implementation plan that reflects the determinations in this decision.

Secretary General

¹ See section 4.8. c) of the Canadian NPA Relief Planning Guidelines.