



Telecom Decision CRTC 2020-110

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Revision to relief implementation schedule for area codes 403, 587, 780, and 825 in Alberta

Background

1. In *Relief for area codes 403, 587, 780, and 825 in Alberta*, Telecom Decision CRTC 2019-130, 3 May 2019, the Commission determined that relief for area codes 403, 587, 780, and 825 in Alberta (the Alberta area codes) was to be provided by implementing a distributed overlay of new area code 368, effective 15 May 2021 (the relief date).
2. In that decision, the Commission also approved the Alberta relief planning committee's (Alberta RPC) report, which included a proposed planning document and a relief implementation plan. The relief implementation plan contains a relief implementation schedule that, in part, sets out time frames for communication activities to promote consumer awareness of the new area code in advance of its introduction. Specifically, the schedule requires that telecommunications service providers (TSPs) notify all customers, including residential, business and special customers, of the introduction of the new area code by 15 May 2020. This requirement ensures that TSPs communicate with customers over a period of at least 12 months prior to the relief date (the customer communications timeline).
3. On 4 May 2019, area code relief came into effect for area codes 236, 250, 604, and 778 in British Columbia. On 12 June 2019, the British Columbia Relief Planning Committee (British Columbia RPC) met to review the successful introduction of area code 672. During that meeting, the chair of the Consumer Awareness Task Force¹ noted that the report of the task force to the British Columbia RPC contained a recommendation to shorten the customer communications timeline from 12 months to six months in localities where 10-digit local dialing and an overlay area code are already in place.
4. On 8 October 2019, the CRTC Interconnection Steering Committee (CISC) approved and forwarded to the Commission, for its approval, the Alberta RPC's [Task](#)

¹ As part of the relief implementation plan, relief planning committees typically establish two task forces for the implementation of area code relief. The first is the Network Implementation Task Force, which establishes and implements the network changes required for the introduction of the area code relief. The second is the Consumer Awareness Task Force which determines and implements the measures to be taken to inform the public of the pending area code relief.

[Information Form Report #2](#) (the TIF Report) proposing changes to the relief implementation schedule for the introduction of the new area code. Specifically, the TIF Report proposed that the relief implementation schedule be modified in order to shorten the customer communications timeline from 12 months to six months.

The TIF Report

5. In the TIF Report, the Alberta RPC indicated that the factors that led the Consumer Awareness Task Force to recommend a shorter customer communications timeline in the case of British Columbia area code relief, in particular the presence of multiple overlay area codes and local 10-digit dialing, also apply in the case of Alberta area code relief. In addition, the Alberta RPC stated that it is currently not following the approved relief implementation schedule because it agrees with the Consumer Awareness Task Force recommendation for a shorter customer communications timeline in areas where 10-digit dialing and an overlay area code already exist.
6. The Alberta RPC noted that the 12-month customer communications timeline was established specifically to address the introduction of an initial overlay area code and the transition from 7-digit to 10-digit local dialing. In such instances, customers require time to adjust their equipment to accept more than one area code for the same geographic area and to adjust dialing patterns for equipment such as auto-dialers. Further, the 12 months include a three-month permissive dialing period during which dialed 7-digit local calls are intercepted with an announcement reminding callers that they must dial 10 digits. When overlay area codes are already in place, none of these measures are required.
7. The Alberta RPC further noted that the idea of more than one area code serving the same geographic area is not foreign to customers when an overlay area code is already in use. It acknowledged that customers served by the Alberta area codes will require some advance notice of area code relief to give them time to enter the new area code into their systems and databases, but stated that the process is not as involved as it is when an overlay area code is introduced for the first time.
8. The Alberta RPC indicated that the CISC Canadian Steering Committee on Numbering is currently developing amendments to its guidelines for area code relief planning with respect to customer communications timelines.
9. The Alberta RPC reported that it had reached consensus to modify the relief implementation schedule in order to shorten the customer communications timeline from 12 months to six months. It also proposed that the media release regarding the new area code should be issued six months before the relief date, to correspond with communications to customers.

Commission's analysis and determinations

10. When an overlay area code and mandatory 10-digit local dialing are already in place, the introduction of another overlay area code does not have a significant impact on TSPs, or on telecommunications customers that operate switching equipment;

essentially, it requires the addition of an area code to systems and databases already configured for multiple area codes. The overall impact on customers is minimal in such areas, since no change in local call dialing patterns is required.

11. Furthermore, because customers already understand that multiple area codes can serve the same geographic area, they need only be made aware that another area code will be introduced in their region. This is particularly true in Alberta, where multiple area codes already serve the entire province.
12. In the present circumstances, with a customer communications timeline of 12 months, the Commission considers that notice of the introduction of the new overlay area code would be given too far in advance. Because there would be no immediate impact on customers, they may no longer recall that a new area code is being implemented by the time it is introduced. The Commission considers that a customer communications timeline of six months is preferable; it allows sufficient time for TSPs to update their systems and is close enough to the relief date for customers to be aware of the new area code when it goes into service.
13. The Commission therefore **approves** the TIF Report, including the recommendations that (i) the relief implementation schedule be modified to shorten the customer communications timeline from 12 months to six months, and (ii) the media release concerning the new area code be issued concurrently with customer communications.

Secretary General