



Idaho Public Utilities Commission

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Case No. GNR-T-15-06, Order No. 33414

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Idaho's second area code – 986 – launches in late 2017

BOISE (Nov. 2, 2015) – State regulators today approved a 16-month plan for Idaho's second area code to be implemented in late 2017. An hour after the Idaho Public Utilities Commission issued its order approving the plan, the agency that contracts with the federal government to administer the nation's area code numbering plan, Neustar, issued Idaho's second area code: **986**.

The second area code will be issued only to new telephone numbers beginning in late 2017. Idaho is one of few states that still has one area code, "208" issued in 1947.

The commission adopted the unanimous recommendation of Idaho's telecommunications providers and commission staff that the state implement a "*all-services overlay*," which assigns the new area code statewide to new numbers. This option will ultimately require that all customers in Idaho dial 10 digits (area code, plus prefix, plus four-digit number) beginning in late 2017.

A second option was to implement a "*geographic split*," which would have assigned the new area code to all numbers in one-half the state, requiring all customers assigned the new code to change their telephone numbers. This option would have retained seven-digit dialing for calls within the same area code. About 27 of 41 written comments the commission received favored the split option, but none of the comments addressed future trends that will eventually end seven-digit dialing.

"Neither option is ideal," the commission said, but the overlay will not cause the same level of disruption and expense as a geographic split would have forced on the half of the state required to change its numbers. Furthermore, the commission said, developing technology "will eventually drive seven-digit dialing into obsolescence in the future." Implementation of a geographic split may serve only to prolong seven-digit dialing for a short period, the commission said. "Thus, any future dialing change and relief planning will be eased by the implementation of 10-digit dialing now rather than later."

Under the split, the commission said, businesses of all sizes would have experienced significant disruptions. “Any goodwill of business identification associated with existing phone numbers” would have been lost, the commission said, as businesses would be required to change advertising, letterhead, web pages and business cards. “This is no small expense nor a minor nuisance,” the commission said.

A commission staff investigation determined that every area code addition for the last eight years has been an all-services overlay, rather than a split. In 2008, the West Virginia Public Service Commission reversed its original decision when it found the geographic split created too much of an economic burden and that current technology generally “alleviates most of the problems (associated) with 10-digit dialing.” Commission staff noted that most telecommunications devices, even landline phones, have number storage capability that allows customers to dial entire numbers with the press of one or two buttons.

Neustar has been informing the state that a second area code will be needed since its original forecasted exhaust date of August 2001. In response, the commission implemented various numbers conservation plans that have been successful in delaying a second area code by at least 15 years. However, the proliferation of wireless telephones, new competitive telephone companies, paging and messaging services and Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) is contributing to the increase in demand for new numbers, making further delay impossible.

The plan adopted today by the commission initiates a 16-month transition and customer education process. Telecommunications providers will begin customer education in about six months and commission staff will conduct customer education workshops throughout the state beginning in spring of next year. A “permissive 7-digit and 10-digit dialing period,” will begin at about the end of 2016. This nine-month period will allow customers to begin 10-digit dialing even though seven-digit dialing will still work. Then, in the fourth quarter of 2017, mandatory 10-digit dialing begins.

The commission’s order and other documents related to this case are available on the commission’s Website. Click on “Open Cases” under the “Telecom” heading and scroll down to Case No. GNR-T-15-06. Petitions for reconsideration must be filed with the commission by no later than Nov. 23.

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