



Public Service Commission

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PSC Approves Overlay for 518 Area Code Region — New Area Code Needed To Meet Strong Demand for Cell Phones and Other Telecommunication Services —

ALBANY — The New York State Public Service Commission (Commission) today approved an area code overlay in the 518 area code region serving all or part of 17 counties in eastern upstate New York. In making its decision, the Commission determined that the best way to meet demand for new telephone numbers in the region and minimize customer impact was to overlay a new area code over the existing area code.

“The need for a new area code in this region points to a thriving telecommunications market in eastern upstate New York,” said Commission Chair Audrey Zibelman. “Creating a new area code will allow telephone companies to accommodate growing consumer demand for telephone numbers in this area.”

On May, 16, 2016 the North American Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA), which administers the numbering system for telephone networks in the United States, advised the Commission that the supply of central office codes (the first three digits in a 7-digit phone number) within the 518 area code in eastern upstate New York would exhaust no later than the first quarter of 2019. On August 31, 2016 NANPA notified the Commission that the projected exhaust date for the 518 area code was advanced to the third quarter of 2017, due to an unprecedented demand for central office codes. NANPA requested the Commission to issue an order for relief as soon as possible.

The Commission examined both “geographic split” and “overlay” options. Based upon its review, the Commission determined that an overlay is the preferred option because it is easier to implement from a technical standpoint and less expensive from a customer standpoint, especially for business customers who could be forced to change signage and branding in the event of a geographic split. An overlay occurs when a new area code is superimposed over an existing calling area, and, by definition, it results in more than one area code serving the same calling area or region. Under an overlay plan, existing telephone numbers remain unchanged, and all new telephone numbers would be assigned the new area code.

All of the new area codes created in the United States and New York State over the past several years have been implemented via an overlay. Demand for new phone numbers is driven largely by the phenomenal growth of new technology that requires an individual phone number, such as cell phones and tablets. With the overlay method, customers served by both the old area code and the new area code will need to dial 10 digits (the area code plus the 7-digit number) on calls in their area code, and 1 plus 10 digits for calls to numbers outside their area code.

Throughout the proceeding, the Commission held numerous informational forums and public statement hearings, and received many comments from the public via its website. Among the public who commented in this proceeding, a sizable 60 percent majority favored the overlay option.

With its decision, the Commission directed all telephone carriers in the 518 area code region to file within 45 days a plan outlining the steps necessary to implement the overlay, including a permissive dialing period that allows both 7-digit and 10-digit (area code plus 7-digit number) dialing. After this permissive dialing period, only 10-digit dialing will be allowed, and any misdialed calls will be trigger a message directing the caller to dial 10 digits. While implementation of a new area code typically takes approximately 18 months, the implementation schedule may be expedited in this case in order to minimize the potential for a shortage of numbers, due to the accelerated exhaust date forecasted by NANPA. NANPA will choose a new 3-digit area code within 30 days of the issuance of the order.

The 518 area code is the only original New York area code that still has its original boundaries, and one of the few remaining original national area codes (not counting those serving an entire state) that has never been split or overlaid with a new area code. The 518 area code serves all or part of the following counties: Albany, Clinton, Columbia, Dutchess, Essex, Franklin, Fulton, Greene, Hamilton, Montgomery, Rensselaer, Saint Lawrence, Saratoga, Schenectady, Schoharie, Warren and Washington.

The Commission's decision in this proceeding, when issued, may be obtained by going to the Commission Documents section of the Commission's Web site at www.dps.ny.gov and entering Case Number 16-C-0297 in the input box labeled "Search by Case Number". Many libraries offer free Internet access. Commission documents may also be obtained from the Commission's Files Office, 14th floor, Three Empire State Plaza, Albany, NY 12223 (518-474-2500). If you have difficulty understanding English, please call us at 1-800-342-3377 for free language assistance services regarding this press release.