



OCC Actively Participates as 959 Area Code Overlay Issues Arise

OCC and the North American Numbering Plan

OCC has been active in telephone area codes issues at PURA and a principal attorney at the OCC served for many years as a voting member of the North American Numbering Council (NANC), a Federal Advisory Committee managed by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). The NANC was created to advise the FCC on numbering issues and to make recommendations that foster efficient and impartial number administration. In that capacity, the NANC administers the North American Numbering Plan (NANP), an integrated telephone numbering plan that encompasses 25 countries and territories primarily in North America and the Caribbean.

The Reasons for a New Area Code in the Existing 860 Numbering Plan Area (NPA)

The need for the 959 overlay was postponed for nearly a decade due to number conservation measures affected by the NANC, OCC, and PURA. In telephony, an overlay plan is the practice of introducing a new area code by applying it onto a geographic area that is already occupied by one or more existing area codes, resulting in two (or more) area codes serving the same area.

The NANC now forecasts, however, that the Connecticut 860 NPA will run out of telephone numbers (exhaust) in the 4th quarter of 2014, requiring that 959 NXX codes be made available for assignment to customers/end users by September 30, 2014. A committee of telephone industry stakeholders and interested parties such as the OCC has been formed to oversee the implementation of the 959 area code. This group will work with PURA to implement the 959 area code overlay and oversee the administration of a consumer education program to inform telecommunications service users of the new dialing plan in the 860 NPA.

The introduction of competition to the telephone industry in the early 1990s brought a heightened demand for telephone numbers as new competitors began offering services, mostly business lines, into Connecticut.

Also, the rapid growth in popularity of mobile phones increased demand for new phone numbers even more. The rise in popularity of mobile phones, and there are about three-times as many mobile phone numbers in Connecticut than wireline numbers, has added to the pressure for a new area code in the state. The impact on residents and businesses includes notification to



friends and customers, changes in stationery, and new dialing habits. The change is also complex for the industry as an area code change affecting the exchange in which a cell phone is based not only forces customers to reprogram their phones, but requires the wireless carrier to reassign the number of every device based in those areas.

Why an Overlay of a New Area: Why Not Just Another Split?

Prior to the introduction of overlay plans, the method of introducing new area codes in a region was to divide the existing territory of one area code into two (or more) pieces, usually allowing the more established or developed section to retain the original area code, and changing the numbering space of the other section(s) to have a new area code.

To alleviate complaints about such changes, in 1992 the telecommunication industry began to introduce "overlay plans" as a means to introduce new area codes. In this model, one fixed geographic area would concurrently have multiple valid area codes throughout. This plan's main benefit, which addressed many of the issues causing resistance to split plans, was that all existing phone numbers remained unaffected by the new area code. Newly-assigned numbers in the overlay plan areas would have the new area code. As a result, two telephones in the same building could have different area codes. The first use of this solution was in the borough of Manhattan in New York City, where area code 917 was added to the original 212.

However, overlay plans introduced a new inconvenience: mandatory 10-digit dialing (i.e., the area code must be included), even for local calls, in the affected area. This and the difficulty of remembering all the area codes in a geographic area made overlay plans only marginally less unpopular than split plans. 10-digit dialing is not a technical requirement but a FCC mandate to promote fairness among telephone companies due to the introduction of competition to the telephone marketplace in the early 1990s.

History and Dialing Patterns.

Area code 475 went into effect on December 12, 2009. Even though area code 475 overlays only 203, all callers in Connecticut (including those in area code 860) have had to dial all calls with ten digits since November 2009. This has been required because of the then future need for the overlay of area code 959 on area code 860. As an historic aside, the City of Meriden is notable as the only place in Connecticut where one can call towns in either the Hartford or New Haven exchanges toll-free from a home (landline) phone.



Area code 860 is a telephone area code that covers most of Connecticut, except its southwest, which uses area codes 203 and 475. Area code 959, originally announced in August 1999, will overlay area code 860. In preparation for this introduction, since November 2009 all calls within Connecticut have been required to be dialed with 10 digits beginning with the area code, including calls involving two numbers using the same area code. A leading 1+ is required on toll calls originating from landlines, but is not required on local calls, nor on any calls originating from wireless phones

The 860 area code was created on August 28, 1995 as a split from area code 203 when the latter was cut back to Fairfield County (except for the Town of Sherman) and New Haven County, plus the towns of Bethlehem, Woodbury, and a small part of Roxbury in Litchfield County. Use of 860 became mandatory October 4, 1996.

By Decision dated September 22, 1999, in Docket No. 96-11-10RE1 *DPUC Review of Management of Telephone Numbering Resources in Connecticut*, the Public Utilities Regulatory Authority (Authority or PURA) ordered in part, that the 959 area code be overlaid on the existing 860 numbering plan area (NPA). As noted above, that requirement has been delayed through number conservation measures since that decision, but continued competition and the explosion of mobile phones has finally created a need due to the impending exhaust of 860 telephone numbers.