

Mary S. Hobson (ISB# 2142)
Stoel Rives LLP
101 S. Capitol Blvd., Suite 1900
Boise, ID 83702-5958
Telephone (208) 389-9000
Facsimile (208) 389-9040

Attorneys for Qwest Corporation and
Qwest Wireless, LLP

BEFORE THE IDAHO PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

**IN THE MATTER OF THE PETITION OF THE)
NORTH AMERICAN NUMBERING PLAN)
ADMINISTRATOR FOR THE APPROVAL OF)
NUMBERING PLAN AREA RELIEF FOR THE)
208 AREA CODE)
_____)**

CASE NO. GRN-T-00-36

COMMENTS OF QWEST

Qwest Corporation and Qwest Wireless, LLC (collectively “Qwest”) file these comments in response to Order No. 28819 served August 23, 2001, by the Idaho Public Utilities Commission (Commission).

BACKGROUND

This matter was initiated by petition of the North America Numbering Plan Administrator (NANPA) on behalf of the telecommunications industry for relief of the 208 area code currently in use throughout the state of Idaho. Before filing the petition, NANPA convened an industry meeting to review and discuss alternative forms of relief to the 208 area code. The industry participants, which included Qwest representatives, reviewed various alternatives and agreed to recommend an all-services overlay plan that would overlay the entire 208 Number Plan Area (NPA) with a new area code. If adopted, once all NXXs from the 208 NPA are assigned, future numbering resources for all service providers will be made from the new area code. All existing 208 customers throughout the state will retain the 208 NPA with their phone number.

In its Notice of Modified Procedure, this Commission has asked the parties to comment upon two geographic split alternatives that would retain the 208 area code for a portion of the state while assigning a new area code to another portion. The Commission also seeks comment on a technology-specific overlay option that would assign area codes based on the technology (wireline or wireless) used by the subscriber.

DISCUSSION

A. THE ALL-SERVICES OVERLAY

1. The Industry Preference

Qwest continues to support the industry's recommendation for an all-services overlay, as submitted by NANPA to the Commission in October 2000. As noted in the Commission's Order No. 28819, an all-services overlay will allow existing customers to retain the original area code, while requests for new or growth NXXs will be made from the new area code. The fact that under an all-services overlay, current telephone customers will not be forced to change their 208 area code contrasts with other alternatives being considered by the Commission. The geographic split alternatives require hundreds of thousands of customers to change the area code portion of their numbers and the technology-specific overlay similarly affects all of the state's wireless customers.

As the Commission observed, if changes to existing numbers are avoided, "no one would have to go through all the expense of printing new stationary and contacting all their customers and friends with their new phone number." Furthermore, NANPA's petition stated the projected life of the all-services overlay is 10 years longer than that of the other alternatives.

2. 10-Digit Dialing

The Commission has noted that early customer reaction to 10-digit dialing has been negative. It is Qwest's observation from customer responses in other states contemplating NPA relief that such a reaction is very typical and needs to be considered in context. It is very natural for customers to resist change, and 10-digit dialing is a change. The industry has been working on measures to extend the life of the North American Numbering Plan (NANP), which is approaching exhaust in its present form. One measure universally recognized by the FCC and the industry as a positive contribution to prolonging the existing NANP is conversion to a

national 10-digit dialing plan. While such a plan is not in effect nationally, it is in place in several locations across the country, including the Denver metropolitan area and most all of the 503 NPA in Oregon. Hence, the introduction of 10-digit dialing should not be the sole factor in rejecting the industry-recommended method of area code relief.

Negative customer response to 10-digit dialing must ultimately be weighed against competing customer concerns about the time and expense that will be required to convert long-established “208” numbers. Considering the impact on customers of a telephone number change, and the significant costs customers will incur in making that change, the Commission may want to reconsider the all-services overlay alternative.

3. Some Change Will Occur

The unfortunate fact is that any form of area code relief will involve inconvenience and readjustment for some customers. As noted above, preserving 7-digit dialing for all local calls is possible only by adopting a geographic split, forcing hundreds of thousands of existing customers to change the area code portion of their telephone numbers. In addition, the preservation of 7-digit dialing may only be sustained for a limited time if a national dialing plan is adopted by the FCC¹.

In addition to these factors, however, the Commission should also consider the impact of future area code relief plans. Should the Commission select an area code split at this time, additional changes will be required when subsequent relief is needed. If subsequent relief is provided in the form of an overlay, 10-digit dialing will be required at that time. Conversely, if in the future the Commission orders a second geographic split, many of the same customers will need to change their telephone numbers a second time.

¹ Models have shown the North American Numbering Plan could run out of numbers between 2006 and 2012 if no action is taken, but capacity could be increased by 25 percent if 10-digit dialing becomes a reality, according to FCC officials. At least six states already require the area code (10-digit dialing) when making calls in parts, if not throughout, the state. These include Virginia, Maryland, Colorado, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Texas. Jeremy Pelofsky, *FCC Won't Order 10-Digit Dialing for Local Calling*, Reuters News Service, December 6, 2000.

In comparison, should the Commission select an all-services overlay for area code now, there will be only one change for the customer: 10-digit dialing. When future area code relief is required, assuming an overlay is again used, there will be no change in telephone numbers, no costs to the customers, and no change in dialing. The all-services overlay alternative involves the one-time change to 10-digit dialing but thereafter does not disrupt existing customers.

B. THE GEOGRAPHIC SPLIT ALTERNATIVES

The Commission notes that the geographic split Options 1 and 2 are “attractive because they have relatively balanced projected area code lifetimes, disrupt a minimum of existing EAS routes or communities with common interests, and preserve 7-digit dialing for local calls within each area code for the present time.” Qwest agrees with these observations but notes that preservation of 7-digit dialing may be of limited duration based on work already in progress at a national level for expansion of the NANP.

Qwest agrees with the Commission that both Options 1 and 2 provide minimal disruption of existing EAS routes and communities of interest. If, after consideration of these industry comments, the Commission determines a geographic split will best serve Idaho, Qwest supports the selection of Option 1 because it keeps the Magic and Treasure Valleys in the same area code.

The Industry Numbering Committee (INC) NPA Relief Guidelines recommend that the area with the longest expected life should receive the new area code. According to NANPA, under Option 1, Area A, (i.e. that comprising the north and eastern parts of the state) will have the longest life. Selecting Option 1 and assigning the new area code to Area A would allow the capital city of Boise (in Area B), with its high concentration of government and business, as well as its surrounding extended community of interest, to retain the 208 area code.

An additional consideration for making the choice of allowing Area B in Option 1 to retain the 208 area code is the high percentage of wireless codes that are assigned in Area B. Of the over 300 codes assigned in this area, nearly 30% are assigned to wireless providers. An area code split causes exceptional inconvenience to wireless customers who may need to hand carry or otherwise deliver their handset to their provider for individual, manual reprogramming of the area code. Limiting the number of wireless customers that are required to change their area codes is an important consideration in selecting an area code relief option for this reason.

Should the Commission select an area code split for relief of the 208 area code, Qwest supports allowing wireless providers the option to grandfather their existing 208 NXX codes. The FCC has determined that state commissions may permit wireless carriers to grandfather their existing NXX codes in connection with an area code split. With optional grandfathering, each wireless carrier will have the opportunity to balance the cost and customer inconvenience of reprogramming customers' handsets against the 10-digit local dialing requirement and to decide which alternative best serves the needs of its market.² In many cases, the reprogramming cannot be accomplished through remote facilities, and the customers will be required to bring or mail their handsets to a location capable of performing the necessary functions. The costs incident to the reprogramming also place disproportionate burdens on wireless, as opposed to wireline, carriers.³ For these reasons, Qwest urges the Commission to allow optional grandfathering for wireless carriers in the new NPA if a geographic split is ordered.

C. TECHNOLOGY-SPECIFIC OVERLAYS

Qwest does not support technology-specific overlays. A technology-specific overlay was not considered as a viable area code relief alternative by the industry in September 2000, nor included in NANPA's petition in October 2000. This is, in part, because the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) has repeatedly denied requests by state commissions to implement such overlays. Although this Commission's Order No. 28819 notes that the FCC is reconsidering this prohibition, Qwest does not believe that technology-specific overlays otherwise provide attractive alternatives for area code relief.

As the Commission indicated in its preliminary findings, there are "at least three problems" with technology-specific overlays. Apart from the FCC prohibition, there are the problems of disadvantage to wireless carriers and of the effectiveness and timeliness of the relief

² Optional grandfathering of NXX codes should be limited to Type 2 wireless interconnections (interconnections through a tandem switching facility), because with this form of interconnection, wireless carriers are assigned entire NXX blocks. Under a Type 1 interconnection, the wireless carrier interconnects through a particular central office and, therefore, shares the NXX codes for that central office with the wireline carrier. Because of technical difficulties, grandfathering in that circumstance is much less feasible.

³ Qwest acknowledges that technology exists through which some handsets can be reprogrammed through remote facilities. Not all carriers are currently equipped with the technology nor can all handsets be so reprogrammed. For example, although it is currently

provided by such an alternative. Qwest agrees with the Commission that these problems exist and further asserts that they render this alternative unworkable.

1. The FCC Prohibition

The most obvious problem with the technology-specific overlay is the FCC's prohibition ordered September 28, 1998.⁴ There is significant discussion in the FCC order that this method of area code relief would create "discrimination against an industry segment". Qwest remains convinced that this is a serious disadvantage to any technology-specific plan for area code relief. To date, the FCC has not delegated authority to any state to implement a technology-specific overlay. While the FCC has stated it will "revisit the prohibition on service-specific or technology-specific overlays," one can only speculate on what may result from such FCC action.

The FCC, in its Second Report and Order in the Numbering Resource Optimization docket released December 29, 2000 (FCC 00-429), has stated that one basis for revisiting technology-specific overlays is for "diverting a portion of the demand for numbering resources in existing area codes." In the case of the 208 area code, however, a technology-specific overlay would not be limited to diverting new demand for numbering resources. Rather, this alternative would force the existing wireless market segment to convert to the new area code. Thus, the sole burden of change would fall to one industry segment. The proposal would have a significant impact on wireless carriers and wireless customers. Although suggested by the Commission for consideration, Qwest does not support any area code relief alternative that would result in discrimination against an industry or technology-specific market segment.

2. An Unworkable Alternative

The Commission has mentioned a concern that a technology-specific overlay may not be implemented in time to provide adequate relief. Qwest agrees that the additional time necessary to obtain authorization from the FCC to pursue this alternative, assuming such authorization is still an available option, could itself eliminate the technology-specific overlay as a viable alternative.

exploring potential technology solutions, Qwest Wireless presently anticipates that it will have to reprogram its handsets manually.

⁴ *In the Matter of Petition for Declaratory Ruling and Request for Expedited Action on the July 15, 1997 Order of the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission Regarding Area Codes 412, 610, 215 and 717*, FCC 98-224, CC Docket No. 96-98.

More importantly, a technology-specific overlay will not provide adequate relief for the 208 area code in any event. Current industry information indicates there are only 162 wireless NXX codes out of the total 580 NXX codes assigned in the entire 208 area code. This represents approximately 28% of the total assigned resources. Assuming 28% of the existing NXX codes are reassigned the new area code, an extreme imbalance will occur between the old and the new area codes. This imbalance will likely cause the 208 area code to exhaust much sooner than the new area code. This is not a good use of industry numbering resources because the new technology-specific area code will be underutilized, while the 208 area code will require subsequent relief in a relatively short period of time. An all-services overlay, on the other hand, provides maximum use of all numbering resources, while minimizing the risk of unexpected exhaust.

Finally, the problems of the technology-specific overlay will be compounded with the advent of FCC-mandated wireless Local Number Portability (LNP) and subsequent Number Pooling participation, starting in late 2002. When those mandates go into effect, numbering resources become available for common use between both wireline and wireless service providers. Once wireless providers are required to port and pool their numbers, a wireless customer may choose to change from wireless to service to wireline. That customer will have the right to port his/her wireless telephone number to a wireline service provider. At that point (November 2002), any attempt to separate numbers on a technology-specific basis cannot be carried out on a practical basis.

D. TIMING FOR AREA CODE RELIEF

NANPA's petition filed October 27, 2000, offered recommendations to the Commission for both a method and timing of area code relief. The petition included a recommended date of January 12, 2002, for the introduction of permissive 10-digit dialing. Migration to such dialing is, of course, a necessary feature of the industry-recommended alternative.

If, after consideration of the alternatives, the Commission chooses to adopt an all-services overlay for area code relief, it will be necessary to establish a date for permissive dialing. This is essential to allow an adequate interval for network readiness by the service providers to allow 10-digit dialing. The industry needs six months to properly prepare its networks and to do initial customer education before permissive dialing begins.

Should the Commission select an area code split for the 208 relief, industry participants need this same six-month period prior to the beginning of permissive dialing to introduce the new area code into their switches and to complete initial customer education. In addition, Qwest recommends six months of permissive dialing prior to mandatory dialing of the new area code.

As filed in the NANPA petition for relief, the industry recommends permissive dialing commence in January 2002. Since January, 2002 is now just four months away, Qwest appeals to the Commission to keep this industry readiness lead time in mind when selecting the actual start date for permissive dialing for the Idaho 208 area code relief, whether it is in the form of a split or an overlay. It is important to note the INC NPA Relief Guidelines recommend providing relief (i.e. implementing mandatory dialing changes) one year prior to area code exhaust. In this case, exhaust is projected to be third quarter 2003, therefore, mandatory dialing by third quarter 2002 would be within the guidelines.

E. RATE CENTER CONSOLIDATION

While the choice of a specific area code relief alternative is a highly important issue, Qwest believes the Commission should consider this issue within the broader context of numbering resource management. In particular, Qwest recommends the Commission carefully consider rate center consolidation. Qwest believes that rate center consolidations are matters that must be left up to the states to resolve on a case-by-case basis and urges that consolidations occur where appreciable number conservation is anticipated.

In Docket No. USW-T-99-21, Qwest Corporation's predecessor, U S WEST Communications, Inc., provided a list of rate centers for consideration as candidates for consolidation. Qwest continues to support that list. However, since the original analysis of these areas was done in 1999, Qwest has developed several additional areas of analysis to assist in determining the impacts of proposed consolidation. Qwest is undertaking a fresh look at the additional criteria for each of these rate centers in preparation for further discussion with the Commission Staff.

Factors that Qwest considers today in the analysis of any potential rate center consolidation are:

1. Network impacts (trunking, facilities/capacity, features, Voice Messaging).

2. Revenue impacts (switched access, intra-LATA toll, products).
3. Future impacts on Qwest's ability to acquire numbering resources in multiple switch rate centers since the initiation of the FCC Numbering Resource Optimization (NRO) Order requirements.
4. 911 Router/Emergency Services impacts if rate centers are consolidated that previously sent calls to different Public Service Answering Points (PSAPs).

Rate centers with common local calling generally will not have trunking or facility/capacity issues, but may have different versions of Voice Messaging, which may require software upgrades before a consolidation could take place. Without the software upgrades, Voice Messaging customers in the "new" rate center who port their numbers to a switch with an older version of Voice Messaging software may experience call notification problems including the loss of "stutter dial tone."

Rate centers with common local calling area will very likely not have revenue impacts.

The creation of multiple-switch rate centers creates a problem for the service provider if one or more of the switches has significantly higher growth rate and percent utilization than the other switches. The problem is, outside of a pooling environment, there is not a practical, documented method for sharing spare numbers between these switches to even out the inventory and allow for reasonable management of the resources within the rate center.

Rate centers considered for consolidation that do not currently have common local calling areas will probably have network, revenue and potential numbering resource qualification issues that would require significant detailed study.

Qwest supports the general concept of rate center consolidation. Qwest remains open to further discussion with Commission Staff regarding rate center consolidations where NXX codes may be saved, but recommends that wholesale rate center consolidation where there is no expected savings of NXX codes may not be warranted. As part of on-going discussions with Staff regarding rate center consolidations, Qwest believes it is necessary for Staff, other parties, and Qwest to agree on the criteria and methodology required to objectively identify rate centers as potential candidates for consolidation. After the criteria and methodology have been developed and agreed upon, Qwest is prepared to work with Staff on defining the merits of

specific rate center consolidation candidates and, subsequently, develop an agreement on a reasonable implementation schedule. For any rate center consolidation, Qwest recommends a minimum of six months lead-time for industry-wide notification and system/billing changes to occur since rate center consolidation will affect service providers across the nation that exchange traffic with Idaho.

CONCLUSION

Qwest continues to support the all-services overlay as the best long-term option for relief for the 208 area code. If the Commission does not select that option, Qwest believes that the second-best alternative is geographic split Option 1 and the assignment of the new area code to Area A. In the event that the Commission orders a geographic split, Qwest supports allowing wireless providers the option to grandfather their existing 208 NXX codes. This will permit wireless providers to balance the cost and customer inconvenience of reprogramming customers' handsets against the 10-digit local dialing requirement and to decide which alternative best serves the needs of their customers.

Qwest urges the Commission to keep the implementation timelines recommended by the industry in mind as it prepares its order in this matter. Telecommunications companies require six months to prepare for the implementation of permissive dialing. Another six-month period of permissive dialing is recommended for both the geographic split and all-services overlay alternatives.

Finally, Qwest hopes to continue to work with the Commission and its Staff to implement other measures, such as rate center consolidation, to further manage and conserve numbering resources.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED this 13th day of September, 2001.

STOEL RIVES LLP

Mary S. Hobson
Attorneys for Qwest Corporation and
Qwest Wireless, LLP