

P-999/M-95-357

ORDER AFTER RECONSIDERATION

BEFORE THE MINNESOTA PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION

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Chair
Commissioner
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In the Matter of the 612 Area Code Numbering
Plan Area Exhaust Case

ISSUE DATE: November 3, 1995

DOCKET NO. P-999/M-95-357

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PROCEDURAL HISTORY

In April, 1995, the Numbering Plan Administration Center of US WEST Communications, Inc., the entity charged with assigning telephone numbers in Minnesota, informed the state telecommunications industry that an exhaustion of prefixes in the (612) area code could occur as early as the third quarter of 1996.

In response to the notice, open forums were held in Minnesota in April and May, 1995. Participating in the forums were telecommunications service providers from all industry segments, major state regulatory agencies, consumer groups, representatives of business interests, and other interested parties. No consensus was reached regarding the resolution of the number exhaustion issues.

In June, 1995, the Numbering Plan Administrator filed a report outlining solution alternatives and views expressed by the forum participants.

On June 22, 1995, the Commission issued a press release describing the exhaust issues and the two primary options for their resolution, and soliciting comments from the public.

On June 23, 1995, the Commission issued a notice of comment period in this proceeding. Responsive comments were received from regulatory agencies representing ratepayers and small business, telephone companies, cellular and cable companies, consumer groups, and customers.

On August 23, 1995, the Commission issued its ORDER SETTING METHOD FOR INTRODUCING NEW AREA CODE IN MINNESOTA. In that Order the Commission chose the geographic split method to bring relief to the nearly exhausted (612) area code.

The Commission determined that the Twin Cities metropolitan calling area (MCA) would retain the (612) area code and all other (612) exchanges (with the exception of five exchanges to the southeast) would be assigned a new area code.¹

The August 23 Order placed the five (612) exchanges to the southeast of the Twin Cities local calling area (Red Wing, Goodhue, Wabasha, White Rock, and Lake City) in the (507) area code.

On September 6, 1995, the City of Red Wing, the Red Wing Public Schools, the Red Wing Area Chamber of Commerce, the Red Wing Shoe Company, Pottery District Sportswear, River Regional Health Services and the County of Goodhue (collectively, “the Red Wing Group”) filed a petition for reconsideration of the August 23, 1995, Order.

On September 12, 1995, petitions for reconsideration were filed by the Department of Public Service (the Department), Bridge Water Telephone Company (Bridge Water), GTE Minnesota (GTE), and Sherburne County Rural Telephone Company (SCRTC).

On September 15, 1995, the Residential Utilities Division of the Office of the Attorney General (RUD-OAG) filed a reply to the Red Wing Group’s petition for reconsideration.

On September 22, 1995, the Department filed a reply.

Between August 1, 1995, and September 22, 1995, the Commission received over 1500 telephone calls, letters and petition signatures from subscribers affected by the August 23 Order.

On October 10, 1995, the Commission met for the purpose of taking public testimony from any subscriber wishing to address the Commission regarding the area code relief issues. At the meeting, approximately 17 individuals presented oral comments.

On October 12, 1995, the Commission heard oral argument from parties and participants and considered the matters at issue.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

I. PARTICIPANT STATUS FOR THE RED WING GROUP

In Minn. Rules, Part 7829.0100, subp. 14, “a ‘party’ means a person by or against whom a proceeding before the commission is commenced or a person permitted to intervene...” Under this definition, the Red Wing Group is not a party. The Commission will, however, grant the

¹ Bellcore, the national Numbering Plan Administrator, has since designated the new area code as (320).

Red Wing Group the status of “participant” under subp. 13 of the above rule part:

“Participant” means a person who files comments or appears in a proceeding, other than public hearings held in contested cases and other commission proceedings conducted to receive general public comments, to present views without becoming a party.

II. THE PETITIONS FOR RECONSIDERATION

A. The Red Wing Group Petition

1. The August 23, 1995, Order

In the August 23, 1995, Order, the Commission placed the five exchanges of Red Wing, Goodhue, Wabasha, Lake City, and White Rock (the “Southeastern Exchanges”) in the (507) area code.

The Commission explained that most of these exchanges had at least partial toll-free calling to the (507) area code. They were not part of the exploding usage growth of the Twin Cities, the prime cause of the impending (612) area code exhaustion.

The Commission stated that placement in the (507) area code would provide a relatively permanent solution for the five Southeastern Exchanges and would allow them to retain seven-digit dialing indefinitely. Transfer of the five exchanges into the (507) area code would free up about 70,000 telephone numbers for use in the (612) area code numbering relief.

The Commission stated that the effects of number duplication between the (507) area code and prefixes could be mitigated by careful selection of new prefixes, a permissive dialing period, and approximately six months of free intercept service to inform callers of the number change.

2. The Petition

The Red Wing Group requested that the five Southeastern Exchanges be allowed to remain in the (612) area code. The petitioners stated that the new area code, especially when combined with new prefixes for Red Wing and Lake City², will cause significant problems. The Red Wing Group expressed concern regarding communication of emergencies to fire and police emergency numbers. Members of the Red Wing Group cited the adverse impact the number changes would have on small businesses’ advertising, stationery, and promotional expenses. The Group also argued that the change to the (507) area code would discourage the relationship between the area’s small businesses and the Twin Cities metropolitan market. If potential customers and new enterprises perceive the area as being far outside the Twin Cities region, more closely associated

² Some prefixes in the Red Wing and Lake City exchanges are duplicated in the (507) area code and thus would require a change if these exchanges were transferred to the (507) area code.

with Rochester than with the Twin Cities, the effect would be highly detrimental to local businesses.

3. The RUD-OAG's Reply

The RUD-OAG supported the Red Wing Group's petition for reconsideration. The RUD-OAG stated that important new information warranted a change in the area code assignment for the five Southeastern Exchanges. The RUD-OAG cited adverse effects of the (507) area code assignment on safety functions, elderly residents, business advertising, and business competition.

4. Sprint/United

At the October 12, 1995, meeting, Sprint/United, the local telephone company serving Lake City, supported allowing the five Southeastern Exchanges to remain in the (612) area code.

5. Public Comment

Over 1,000 comments and signatures were submitted in support of the Southeastern Exchanges' inclusion in the (612) area code.

B. The Department Petition

The Department stated that new facts have arisen in this proceeding through the opportunity for parties and concerned individuals to provide public comment. Although the new facts require a reconsideration of the previous decision, the Department's recommended new finding would not be inconsistent with the original principles found in the August 23, 1995 Order.

According to the Department, it is now clear that the benefits of placing the five Southeastern Exchanges in the (507) area code do not balance the burden to the exchanges' customers. The 70,000 telephone numbers made available by placing the five exchanges in the (507) area code would not provide a significant benefit because they would only extend (612) numbering relief by about two months. Allowing the Southeastern Exchanges to remain in the (612) area code would provide the least disruption to customers, without significantly hampering the (612) relief efforts.

While the metropolitan calling area was a logical point to begin shaping the area code relief plan, the Department stated, each request for individual treatment must be decided on a case-by-case basis. The Department stated that the five Southeastern Exchanges are uniquely burdened because of the need in many cases for new prefixes as well as a new area code. They are also uniquely placed in a "peninsula" which is not contiguous with the renumbered (320) area.

The Department stated that inclusion of the five exchanges in the (612) area code would be less

confusing and more customer-friendly than assignment to the (507) area code. This would be consistent with the principles of the August 23 Order.

C. The GTE Petition

1. The Petition

GTE requested reconsideration of the placement of the Almelund, Taylors Falls, New Germany, and Watertown exchanges in the new (320) area code. GTE stated that each of these exchanges has ties to the (612) area code and should remain in that calling code.

a. Almelund and Taylors Falls

GTE stated that Almelund and Taylors Falls have extended area service (EAS) to the Lindstrom exchange, which is part of the Twin Cities local calling area. If these exchanges were assigned to the (320) area code, subscribers would need to dial ten digits instead of the present seven digits to reach Lindstrom.

b. New Germany

New Germany has EAS to Mayer, which is part of the Twin Cities metropolitan calling area. If New Germany were assigned to the (320) area code, as required under the August 23 Order, calls between New Germany and Mayer would require ten rather than seven digits.

c. Watertown

Watertown is currently petitioning for EAS to the metro area. Watertown has EAS to the Delano, Maple Plain, St. Bonifacius, and Mayer metro exchanges. If Watertown were placed in the (320) area code, its present seven-digit dialing to those metro exchanges would become ten-digit dialing.

2. Public Comment

The Commission received several written comments in favor of allowing the GTE exchanges to remain in the (612) area code. The Carver County Board of Commissioners filed a resolution requesting that all Carver County telephone exchanges remain in the (612) area code. New Germany is in Carver County and Watertown is partially located in Carver County. In addition, the City of New Germany requested that the Commission reconsider its assignment of New Germany to the (320) area code.

3. Comments of the Department

The Department supported GTE's request for reconsideration of the placement of these exchanges. The Department stated that retention of seven-digit dialing was a primary goal of the

Commission's August 23 Order. If the Commission wishes to place an exchange with EAS to a metro exchange into the (320) area code, while preserving seven-digit dialing, the exchange's prefix cannot be reused in the (612) area code. This means that the prefix, with its block of telephone numbers, will not be available for (612) area code numbering relief. There is, therefore, no benefit to the overall process which can be balanced against the disruption and burden to the renumbered exchange.

D. The SCRTC Petition

1. The Petition

SCRTC requested reconsideration of the Commission's placement of Becker and Glendorado-Santiago (Glen-Santi) into the (320) area code. SCRTC argued that these exchanges should more logically remain in the (612) area code. SCRTC asked the Commission to clarify the Order regarding the area code assignment for Big Lake.

a. Becker

The Becker exchange has EAS to the Big Lake exchange, which will soon be part of the Twin Cities metropolitan local calling area. If Becker is placed in the (320) area code and its prefix added to the (612) area code, the current seven-digit dialing to Big Lake would become ten-digit dialing. If seven-digit dialing is preserved, Becker's prefix cannot be reused in the metropolitan calling area. SCRTC argued against burdening Becker with an area code change, if there is no net benefit to the overall renumbering plan.

SCRTC also argued that Becker should remain in the (612) area code so that Sherburne County would not be split between two area codes--(612) and (320).

b. Glen-Santi

Glen-Santi also has EAS to a portion of the MCA, the Big Lake and Zimmerman exchanges. SCRTC offered the same arguments it filed on behalf of Becker's inclusion in the (612) area code.

c. Big Lake

Although subscribers in the Big Lake exchange have voted in favor of EAS to the Twin Cities local calling area, and the voting results have been certified by the Commission, EAS has not yet been implemented in the Big Lake exchange. SCRTC therefore asked the Commission to clarify if it meant to place this exchange in the (612) or (320) area code.

2. Public Comment

Representatives from local school districts, city and county governments, local development authorities, and area small businesses spoke strongly in favor of inclusion of these three communities in the (612) area code. Commenting parties stated that they have aggressively marketed the area as an “up and coming” outstate business center with strong ties to the metropolitan area. No such tie exists between these communities and St. Cloud, the largest community in the new (320) area.

In the Becker area alone, over 500 residents signed petitions opposing reassignment to (320), and over 200 subscribers expressed their opposition in comments to the Commission.

State representatives from Becker and Glen-Santi submitted requests that the exchanges remain in the (612) area code.

3. Comments of the Department

The Department supported the requests for reconsideration of the placement of Becker and Glen-Santi. The Department stated that the burdens to subscribers were not balanced by any benefit to overall numbering plan relief.

E. The Bridge Water Petition

1. The Petition

Bridge Water’s Enfield exchange has a pending petition for EAS to the Twin Cities metropolitan local calling area. Enfield already has EAS to two exchanges in the MCA, Monticello and Big Lake. For these reasons, Bridge Water requested that the Commission reconsider its placement of the Enfield exchange into the (320) area code.

2. Comments of the Department

The Department supported the Bridge Water petition, for the reasons articulated for the Almelund, Taylors Falls, and other similarly situated exchanges.

III. OTHER PUBLIC COMMENTS

Numerous individuals offered comments outside of the formal petition process. Many of these comments were in opposition to any realignment of area codes. A few comments in support of the overlay system were submitted. In many cases, only one or two comments were submitted concerning an exchange.

In a handful of cases, the comments seemed to reflect a pattern of interest on behalf of exchange subscribers. The following exchanges had significant comments filed.

A. LeSueur, LeCenter, and Montgomery

Le Sueur County is divided into three sections: a northern section, presently in the (612) metro calling area; a middle section, presently in the (612) area code but without EAS to the metro calling area; and a southern section, presently in the (507) area code.

Under the August 23 Order, exchanges in the middle section of the county would be reassigned to the (320) area code. The LeSueur, Montgomery, and LeCenter exchanges are located in the middle section. Numerous comments in opposition to this reassignment were offered by city officials from these cities, and by county officials and two state representatives.

All commenting parties were in agreement that the middle section of LeSueur County should not become a “sliver” of (320) territory between the (612) exchanges to the north and the southern portion of the county, located in the (507) area code. Such a division of LeSueur County into three area codes would create confusion for cities, counties, and school districts.

Some of those offering comments favored assignment of the (320) sliver to the (507) area code; others favored the (612) area code.

At the October 12 meeting, the Department supported transferring the LeSueur, LeCenter, and Montgomery exchanges to the (507) area code.

B. Arlington, Gaylord, and Green Isle

Arlington and Green Isle are located entirely within Sibley County. The Gaylord exchange is mostly in Sibley County, with a small portion in Nicollet County. Sibley County’s western portion is currently assigned to the (507) area code; the eastern portion of the county is assigned to (612). Under the provisions of the August 23 Order, most of the eastern portion of the county would be assigned to the new (320) area code.

Several agencies located within Sibley County have requested that the entire county, including the Arlington, Gaylord, and Green Isle exchanges, be reassigned to the (507) area code rather than to the (320) area code. No comments were submitted in opposition to this plan.

At the October 12 meeting, the Department indicated that it supported transferring these three exchanges to the (507) area code.

C. Henderson

Henderson, served by Frontier, is located within Sibley, Scott and LeSueur counties. Under the August 23 Order, the exchange would be transferred from the (612) area code to the (320) area code.

Several agencies located within Sibley County have requested that the entire county, including the Henderson exchange, be reassigned to the (507) area code rather than to the (320) area code.

Henderson and LeSueur have a consolidated school district. The superintendent of the consolidated school district protested splitting the school district into separate area codes by assigning a portion of it to the (320) area code.

At the October 12 meeting, the Department supported assigning the Henderson exchange to the (507) area code.

D. Montrose

Montrose is currently pursuing EAS to the Twin Cities metropolitan calling area. Montrose is presently within the (612) area code but under the August 23 Order would be reassigned to the (320) area code.

City and school district representatives submitted comments in favor of allowing the Montrose exchange to remain in the (612) area code. Reasons cited were the potential division of the school district, the city's close social and economic ties to the Twin Cities, and the cost to small businesses of changing literature and advertising.

Approximately 230 letters and a petition signed by 335 Montrose residents were filed in support of allowing Montrose to remain in the (612) area code.

E. Waverly

Like Montrose, Waverly has a pending petition for EAS to the MCA. Because it is currently part of the (612) area code and does not have metro EAS, Waverly would be reassigned to the (320) area code under the Commission's August 23 decision.

The City of Waverly filed a letter signed by approximately 20 residents; a petition with ten signatures was also submitted. These communications were in opposition to the reassignment of the exchange to the (320) area code.

F. Princeton

Princeton is currently part of the (612) area code and has EAS to Zimmerman, a metro exchange. Under the Commission's August 23 Order, Princeton would be reassigned to the (320) area code.

US WEST, which serves Princeton, requested that the exchange remain in the (612) area code. If Princeton were not included in the (612) area code, Princeton subscribers would need to dial ten digits to reach Zimmerman; Princeton to Zimmerman is currently a seven-digit call. Also, exclusion of Princeton from the (612) area code would mean that the area code boundary would wrap around the exchange on three sides.

G. Annandale

The Annandale exchange, located in Wright County, is served by Lakedale Telephone Company. Under the August 23 decision, Annandale would be transferred from the (612) area code to the (320) area code.

Although located near the western edge of the Twin Cities metropolitan area, Annandale does not abut it. Annandale does not have EAS to a metro exchange or a pending metro EAS petition.

Two members of the Annandale city council requested that the Commission reconsider its August 23, 1995, decision favoring the geographical split method over the overlay method.

Two subscribers also submitted comments against being assigned to the (320) area code. Commenting parties discussed the costs to small businesses of changing stationery and promotional materials. They also stated that Annandale is closely tied to the Twin Cities metropolitan community. Commenting parties questioned the wisdom of visiting the problems of exploding Twin Cities phone usage upon rural small businesses and communities.

The Department supported the assignment of Annandale to the (320) area code.

IV. COMMISSION ACTION

A. Introduction

1. Background

The Commission issued its Order on (612) area code numbering relief on August 23, 1995. In that Order the Commission established the major structural framework for a solution to the numbering crisis: the geographical split of the (612) area code into two sections, and the retention of the (612) number by the Twin Cities metropolitan area. The Commission also articulated a policy framework for decisions concerning the numbering crisis. The Commission set the following criteria for its decisions in the renumbering matter: the solution must be less confusing, and more customer-friendly; preserve seven-digit dialing for the greatest possible

period of time; provide a one-time numbering adjustment if possible; be less disadvantageous to competition; establish a geographically distinct area code; and center future numbering relief efforts in the Twin Cities.

2. Public Comments since the August 23 Decision

Since the Commission considered this matter and issued its Order, public reaction has been strong. The Commission received over 1600 letters, faxes, telephone calls and signatures on petitions reflecting the impact of renumbering on private parties, small businesses, and local communities.

Responding to the strong ratepayer reaction, the Commission invited all persons affected by the renumbering crisis to bring their views before the Commission in public testimony.

The Commission gave careful consideration to the verbal and written comments received. Each expression of public reaction was considered in the Commission's decision upon reconsideration.

3. Summary of the Commission's Decision upon Reconsideration

While the Commission has sympathy for commenting parties who expressed dissatisfaction with the concept of any renumbering or realignment, or general unhappiness with anything but the (612) area code, drawing back from the basic solution to the numbering crisis is not feasible or desirable. Without renumbering, the (612) area code would face number exhaustion within a year. There is no choice but to reassign numbers to arrive at the broadest and longest-lasting number relief possible, with as little disruption to subscribers as possible. Part of this process, inevitably, is the reassignment of numbers for some subscribers. The Commission has attempted and will continue to attempt to implement the reassignment as equitably and effectively as possible; unfortunately, some subscribers will experience disruption in the process.

The Commission continues to feel that the basic renumbering method expressed in its August 23 Order is the best possible solution to the imminent fact of number exhaustion. After careful consideration, the Commission finds that the basic structural framework of the August 23 Order, and the policy framework articulated in that Order, are just and reasonable. At the same time, the new information provided by public comment convinces the Commission that it must closely reexamine the individual cases raised and decide if each case fits appropriately into the established framework.

After careful consideration of individuals' written and oral comments, and parties' and participants' briefs, the Commission finds that reconsideration is warranted for two groups of exchanges: 1) the five Southeastern Exchanges; and 2) certain communities presently in the (612) area code, slated for inclusion in the new area code under the August 23 Order, which demonstrate both ties to existing area codes and burdens which outweigh possible renumbering benefits. The latter group of exchanges will be referred to in this Order as the Edge Communities.

The Commission will discuss these two situations in turn.

B. The Five Southeastern Exchanges

1. Comments Offered

In the August 23, 1995, Order, the Commission placed the five Southeastern Exchanges -- Red Wing, Wabasha, Lake City, Goodhue, and White Rock--into the (507) area code.

Since the issuance of that Order, the Commission has received over 1,000 signatures and a flood of comments from Southeastern Exchange ratepayers, overwhelmingly in favor of inclusion in the (612) area code.

Written and oral comments presented a picture of real burden to the five-exchange area. Many comments addressed the special burden to Lake City and Red Wing residents of absorbing not only a new area code but also new prefixes.

Individuals discussed the burden on the tourism industry, a backbone of the area. Commenters noted that promotional brochures and literature are disseminated nationally and internationally and must reflect the correct telephone and fax numbers. Incoming callers attempting to correct the advertised number by simply substituting the (507) area code for the (612) area code would face further confusion because Lake City and Red Wing prefixes will also change.

Commenting parties also expressed concern regarding the effect on public safety and medical facilities if callers confuse numbers because of the radical change. Similarly, the elderly population may face particular challenges if the area code and prefixes change simultaneously.

The business community expressed concern regarding the difference in competitive advantage between area businesses which receive a new prefix and area code and those which must face only a new area code.

Parties specifically stated that they realized inclusion in the (612) area code could mean facing number disruption in the future. Armed with specific knowledge of the possible future consequences, they still preferred to place their lot with the metropolitan area code. Commenters stated that the additional four or five years before (612) again faces exhaustion would provide them the necessary lead time to prepare for renumbering. There is also the possibility that the

(612) area code may not face a further numbering crisis if telephone number portability is attained before exhaustion is again reached.

Commenting parties stressed that their burden of renumbering would not be balanced by corresponding benefit--either to themselves or to the renumbering effort as a whole. Because the use of their prefixes would only provide one to two months further numbering relief for the (612) area code, no significant advantage would be gained.

2. The Commission's Decision

Commenting parties from the five Southeastern Exchanges have presented a vivid picture of the effects of renumbering on their businesses, city and county administration, and public safety, and upon the daily lives of the area citizens. The Commission finds their stories compelling and their burdens very real.

The Commission also notes that, while burdens must inevitably fall in any renumbering solution, these exchanges are uniquely disadvantaged. The five exchanges form a small peninsula adjacent to the (612) local calling area but set completely apart from the renumbered (320) area. The exchanges do not share the logical option of inclusion in the new area code, and will not be readily seen as included in any mass educational campaign regarding renumbering. They share no interest with the (320) communities but have expressed strong ties with the Twin Cities metropolitan area. Lastly, and most significantly, many of the subscribers in this area will experience both the disruption of a new area code and the disruption of a new telephone number.

The Commission must balance the harm these ratepayers have expressed with the benefit afforded the renumbering plan. Now that the burden to residents has been made apparent, the burden clearly outweighs the small benefit of an additional two months' numbering relief for the (612) area code. Upon reconsideration, the Commission finds that it would be poor public policy to change these residents' prefixes, thereby causing them undue disruption, in order to attain very limited additional number relief.

The Commission's decision upon reconsideration is consistent with the structural framework and policy principles of the August 23 Order. Inclusion of the five Southeastern Exchanges in the (612) area code is clearly less confusing and more customer-friendly. Seven-digit dialing will not be disrupted for these ratepayers at this time, and *may* not be disrupted in the future, if number portability is achieved. The overall goal of number relief for the (612) area code will not be significantly affected, since the use of the exchange prefixes would at most offer an additional two months of relief. Inclusion of the exchanges in the (612) area code will mean that the area businesses will not experience competitive differences according to whether prefixes are changed or not.

While inclusion of the five Southeastern Exchanges in the (612) area code will not further the goal of geographic distinction for the renumbering plan, the Commission does not find that this fact warrants the disruption renumbering would bring to the ratepayers.

In the August 23 Order, the Commission used the Twin Cities metropolitan area as a clear, understandable, logical starting point for the renumbering plan. While the Commission continues to find that the MCA was a logical basis for renumbering, this does not mean that the Commission now lacks the flexibility to weigh each community's interests in the renumbering solution. A major goal of any renumbering method is to prevent needless disruption to a community's ratepayers, if this can be accomplished without harm to the overall crisis solution. In the case of the five Southeastern Exchanges, the balance falls clearly in favor of retaining the exchanges in the (612) area code.

For these reasons, upon reconsideration the Commission finds that the five Southeastern Exchanges of Red Wing, Wabasha, White Rock, Goodhue, and Lake City should remain in the (612) area code.

C. The Edge Communities

From the numerous comments submitted by communities slated for transfer from the (612) area code to the (320) area code, certain patterns emerge which require the Commission to reconsider its August 23 decision.

In one fact pattern, (612) area code communities contiguous to the Twin Cities metropolitan local calling area, now destined for transfer to the (320) area code, have demonstrated their strong ties to the metropolitan area and their strong preference for inclusion in the (612) area code. These communities either have EAS to at least one metropolitan exchange or have pending EAS petitions to the metro local calling area.

In another fact pattern, communities to the southwest of the metropolitan calling area, destined for transfer from the (612) area code to the new area code under the August 23 Order, have indicated their first or second preference for the (507) area code over the (320) area code.

The Commission will discuss each of these groups of exchanges in turn.

1. Edge Communities Seeking Inclusion in the (612) Area Code

Eight Edge Communities presently have EAS to at least one metro calling area exchange. Enfield has EAS to Monticello and Big Lake. Becker has EAS to Big Lake. Glen-Santi has EAS to Big Lake and Zimmerman. Taylors Falls and Almelund have EAS to Lindstrom. New Germany and Watertown have EAS to Delano, Maple Plain, Mound, St. Bonifacius, and Mayer. Princeton has EAS to Zimmerman.

For each of these communities, transfer from the (612) area code to the (320) area code would mean that its present seven-digit dialing for EAS to its metro exchange or exchanges would become ten-digit dialing.³ Subscribers in these communities are paying EAS additives for toll-free dialing to their respective metro exchanges. Although the calls would remain toll-free if the exchanges were transferred to (320), the loss of seven-digit dialing would remove much of the “community linkage” the subscribers bargained for when they voted in EAS. The loss of seven-digit dialing is also inconsistent with one of the major goals of the Commission’s overall renumbering plan.

Four Edge Communities have pending petitions for EAS to the Twin Cities local calling area. Enfield and Watertown, which also presently have EAS to one or more metro exchanges, have pending metro EAS petitions. In addition, Montrose and Waverly have outstanding metro EAS petitions.

Although these four petitions have not yet come to the final vote, these Edge Communities have demonstrated their strong desire to join the MCA by going through the lengthy and somewhat complicated EAS petition process.

Each of the ten aforementioned Edge Communities has clearly demonstrated the burden that transfer to the (320) area code would bring. In comment after comment, citizens, representatives of city and county governments, school district administrators, and small business owners from these communities have told of the burden the transfer would place on these areas. They talked of the costs to small businesses from the need to change stationery and literature. They mentioned divisions of school districts. Commenting parties told the Commission of a significant loss in economic development from the perception of their communities as isolated and rural rather than closely tied to the Twin Cities area.

Each of the ten Edge Communities is contiguous to the metro calling area. Each has demonstrated in its comments its commitment to and linkage with the Twin Cities metro area. Party after party mentioned the reality of the close social and economic ties between their communities and the Twin Cities area. These ties are further demonstrated by the EAS arrangements with metro exchanges and pending EAS petitions to the metro area.

The Commission has listened closely to these comments and finds that in these cases the August 23 decision must be adjusted to fit the real needs of these communities. The burden to the ratepayers in these exchanges outweighs the relatively small benefit of transferring their prefixes to the (320) area code. The main reason that the (612) area code must be renumbered

³ Preservation of seven-digit dialing would mean the exchange’s prefix would have to be withheld from the (612) renumbering plan, an action which would nullify any possible benefit.

is the explosion in access usage in the Twin Cities, where over half of the access lines in the state are located. Use of these particular outlying prefixes, in the face of the burdens subscribers have demonstrated to the Commission, would be a poor policy choice.

Inclusion of these ten Edge Communities in the (612) area code still allows the basic structural and policy framework of the August 23 Order to stand. Adjusting the MCA-based (612) renumbering plan to accommodate the compelling needs of particular exchanges is consistent with the Commission's duty to find a just and reasonable solution to the numbering crisis.

For the reasons cited, the Commission will grant the requests for relief brought on behalf of the following exchanges: Enfield; Becker; Glen-Santi; Taylors Falls; Almelund; New Germany; Montrose; Waverly; Watertown; and Princeton. In each of these cases, the Commission will reconsider its decision transferring the exchange into the (320) area code, and will allow the exchange to remain in the (612) area code.

The Commission notes that the characteristics of the aforementioned ten Edge Communities are not in most cases shared by the Annandale exchange, which also protested inclusion in the (320) area code. Annandale is not contiguous to the metro calling area, and does not have either EAS to a metro exchange or a pending metro EAS petition. Inclusion of this non-contiguous exchange in the (612) area code would require abandonment rather than adjustment of geographic distinction for the (612) area code. Finally, Annandale comments seem to request the Commission to reconsider its choice of the geographic split method over the overlay -- a decision the Commission considers essential to the renumbering solution.

The Commission sympathizes with the real burden of adjustment placed upon Annandale subscribers, as well as upon other subscribers in the new (320) area code. Unfortunately, a burden will inevitably fall upon some subscribers as (612) area code numbering relief is accomplished. The Commission cannot, however, abandon the plan if it is to prevent a telecommunications crisis in the state. The Commission must therefore tailor its relief to the specific characteristics of the exchanges. The ten exchanges above have demonstrated characteristics which are consistent with a logical adjustment to the overall relief plan; Annandale has not. The Commission will not grant Annandale its request, either to abandon the geographic split method for the overlay, or to include Annandale in the (612) area code.

2. The Southwestern Edge Communities

Seven exchanges to the southwest of the (612) local calling area, currently slated for transfer from the (612) area code to the (320) area code, have asked the Commission to reconsider its decision in their cases. The seven exchanges are: LeCenter; LeSueur; Montgomery; Arlington; Green Isle; Gaylord; and Henderson.

Each of these exchanges has demonstrated the significant burden that placement in the (320) area code would bring. Commenting parties talked about the burdens placed upon small businesses by the need to change stationery, directories, and promotional literature.

Representatives of local and county governmental units and agencies cited the disruption the transfer would bring. Commenting parties from the LeCenter, LeSueur, and Montgomery exchanges described the confusion, difficulty, and safety concerns that would ensue if LeSueur County were divided into three area codes by the creation of the (320) “sliver.” The superintendent of the consolidated Henderson-LeSueur school district protested splitting the district into separate area codes by assigning a portion of it to the (320) area code.

In each case, the majority of comments from the exchanges requested inclusion in the (507) area code, either as a first choice or as a second preference to inclusion in the (612) area code.

The Commission is persuaded by the comments offered that its August 23 Order must be readjusted to meet the particular circumstances of these exchanges. The burden to the ratepayers in these exchanges is real and compelling. If they are transferred into the (507) area code they will not contribute to future (612) area code exhaustion. Inclusion in the (507) area code, which does not expect to face exhaustion for at least 20 years (in the unlikely event that telephone technology has not prevented exhaustion before that time), will not cause future number disruption. No harm will befall the overall renumbering effort, and much very real burden and disruption for these ratepayers will be prevented.

For the reasons cited, the Commission will adjust its August 23 Order to provide relief to these seven exchanges: LeCenter; LeSueur; Montgomery; Arlington; Gaylord; Green Isle; and Henderson. In each case, the Commission will reconsider its decision to place the exchange in the (320) area code and will instead transfer the exchange to the (507) area code.

3. Big Lake

Big Lake subscribers have voted in favor of EAS to the metro calling area, but EAS has not yet been implemented. SCRTC asked for clarification of the Commission’s intention regarding this exchange.

The Commission clarifies that Big Lake will be included in the (612) area code. This exchange will very shortly be part of the (612) local calling area and is properly included in that area code.

D. Conclusion

Faced with an imminent numbering crisis, the Commission moved swiftly to establish the most effective plan for overall numbering relief. The Commission chose the MCA as the clearest, most logical base for the plan structure. With this decision, the telephone industry was apprised of the basic direction the renumbering solution would take.

The first significant opportunity for the Commission to hear ratepayer input came in the special comment period which followed the issuance of the August 23 Order. The impact of the decision on ratepayers was strongly communicated in written and oral comments and presentations.

The Commission has listened to the comments and tried to the best of its ability to respond to ratepayer concerns. The Commission has made every effort to adjust the plan for particular needs, while maintaining a renumbering system that will provide the greatest possible relief to all affected subscribers. The Commission believes that this decision balances a solution to a technological crisis with the realities of the lives and livelihoods of the ratepayers affected.

ORDER

1. The Commission reconsiders its August 23, 1995, Order to transfer the following exchanges from the (507) area code to the (612) area code: Red Wing; Wabasha; Lake City; Goodhue; and Wabasha.
2. The Commission reconsiders its August 23, 1995, Order to transfer the following exchanges from the (320) area code to the (612) area code: Enfield; Becker; Glen-Santi; Taylors Falls; Almelund; New Germany; Montrose; Waverly; Watertown; and Princeton.
3. The Commission reconsiders its August 23, 1995, Order to transfer the following exchanges from the (320) area code to the (507) area code: LeCenter; LeSueur; Montgomery; Arlington; Gaylord; Green Isle; and Henderson.
4. The Commission clarifies its August 23, 1995, Order by clarifying that the Big Lake exchange will remain in the (612) area code.
5. The August 23, 1995, Order remains unchanged in every other respect.
6. This Order shall become effective immediately.

BY ORDER OF THE COMMISSION

Burl W. Haar
Executive Secretary

(S E A L)

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