



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

540 AREA CODE EXHAUST RELIEF

Case No. PUR-2019-00148

The North American Numbering Plan Administrator ("NANPA") has notified the Virginia State Corporation Commission ("Commission") that the 540 area code is on track to exhaust all available numbers during the second quarter of 2022. The NANPA filed an Application with the Commission on September 9, 2019, to determine how to alleviate the exhaust issue. Below are frequently asked questions that help to explain area code exhaust, the Commission's involvement, what the options for relief are, and how the process will work.

What is area code exhaust?

When an existing area code, such as 540, nears the assignment of all available phone numbers. In short, we are running out of available numbers under the 540 area code.

What happens when we are close to an area code exhaust?

The NANPA contacts the Commission and industry to begin the relief planning process. The relief planning process for the 540 area code exhaust started back in June 30, 2019. It can take up to 36 months for the entire process to conclude and a new area code to be implemented.

How are the numbering resources being depleted in area code 540?

Subscriber growth and the expansion of services requiring phone numbers eventually exhausts the numbering resources available within an area code. Every cellular provider (this includes tablet devices with cellular service), wireline provider, alarm service provider, and voice over the internet ("VoIP") phone service provider is assigned numbers from those available in each area code.

Who decides to change my area code?

The Telecommunication Act of 1996 gave the Federal Communications Commission ("FCC") jurisdiction over the telephone numbering plan in the United States. From this authority, the FCC established the NANPA. However, the FCC delegated authority to state regulatory commissions to resolve matters involving implementing new area codes. The actual assignment of any new area code comes from the NANPA.

What are the options to relieve the 540 area code exhaust situation?

The most common two options are:

*A geographic split: This would carve the existing 540 area code zone into two separate areas. One region would retain the 540 area code and the other would convert to a newly assigned second area code.

*An all-services overlay: This would superimpose a newly assigned area code over the area currently covered by the existing 540 area code. The entire current 540 area would then be covered by both the 540 area code and the newly assigned area code.

In this case there are two additional overlay alternatives. Each alternative is an NPA Elimination Boundary Overlay:

*A 540 and 434 overlay

*A 540 and 276 overlay

In both of these alternatives either the current 434 area code area OR the current 276 area code area would be “combined” with the current 540 area code area. If approved, the near exhausted 540 area would be combined with areas in either the 434 or 276 area code. Then those numbers would be assigned in areas of both 540 and 434; or the 540 and 276.

What are the pros and cons of each option?

Geographic Split

PROS

*Maintains 7 digit dialing in area that remains in the 540 area code

CONS

*1/2 of the current area covered by the 540 area code would have to change their phone numbers

*Financial impact to businesses in new area code

*Customers would need to update family, friends, and business associates with new area code and phone number information

*Requires a longer implementation time by industry and is more costly

All-Services Overlay

PROS

*All existing customers would retain the current 540 area code

*Less confusion & easier education process

*Less financial impact on businesses

*Does not split cities or counties into separate area codes

*Moves customers to universal 10 digit dialing

*Minimizes call routing issues, especially with ported numbers

CONS

*Local calls would require 10 digit dialing

*Customers would have to reprogram auto-dialing equipment

*Cost to update signage & printed material from 7 digit to 10 digit

NPA Elimination Boundary Overlay Alternatives

PROS

- * Eliminates need to open a new NPA

CONS

*Boundary elimination alternatives have shorter lives than the all-services overlay. The 540/434 area code life would be shortened to 12 years; while the 540/276 area code life would be shortened to 16 years.

*Impacts a larger quantity of customers than the all-services overlay or the geographic split.

*Requires customers in either the 434 or 276 NPAs to dial 10 digits where otherwise they wouldn't be subjected to area code relief for another 30 years.

If the Commission decides on a geographic split, would existing customers in the newly assigned area code be required to change their phone number?

Yes.

If an NPA Elimination Boundary Overlay is ordered, would all current customers keep their current phone numbers?

Yes

If an all services overlay is ordered, would all current customers keep their current phone numbers?

Yes.

How would an all-services overlay affect customer dialing habits?

Under an all-services overlay, 10 digit dialing would be a requirement. In a contiguous geographic area where only one area code exists, that area code is assumed to be part of the phone number by default. Number 555-1234, for example, is assigned to only one unique account in a geographic boundary assigned to that single area code. Where two or more area codes are assigned within the same geographic area, the area code cannot be assumed. Using the same example, 555-1234 could be assigned to two separate users; one in each of the two area codes. Therefore, additional information (dialing the area code) is required to correctly route calls to the intended call recipient. While this does require the dialing of three additional digits, with today's technology, most of our devices store a majority of our contact information. Therefore, there will be very little change for most individuals.

How has Virginia handled this issue in the past?

Most recently, in Case No. PUR-2019-00059, the Commission addressed an Application filed regarding the 757 Area Code Exhaust. This covers the far south-eastern part of the state and the eastern shore. The Staff filed its Report on September 6, 2019, which recommended approval of the proposed all-services overlay with 10 digit dialing. Based on Staff's Report, Richmond and local on-site hearing participation, and filed comments the assigned Hearing Examiner issued a report to the Commission for its review and consideration. On February 5, 2020, the Commission issued an Order on Area Code Relief approving the

all-services distributed overlay option. On December 1, 2000, the Commission approved a geographic split as the relief method for the 804 area code (Case No. PUC-1999-00159). The western section of the then current 804 area code was assigned a new area code, 434, while the eastern section, including metropolitan Richmond, kept the 804 area code. Previously, in 1996, the 804 area code went through a geographic split, when the 540 area code was first established. On November 23, 1998, the Commission approved an all services overlay which added the 571 area code to the established 703 area code in northern Virginia (Case No. PUC-1996-00161). While the Commission has approved both options, it should be noted that in the United States there has not been a geographic split implemented since 2006 in New Mexico.

Once the Commission makes a decision, what happens?

A Final Order will be issued by the Commission that also approves or modifies the requested schedule for implementing the approved plan. Education will be provided in the 540 area by both the NANPA and the Commission.

How can I comment on the issues raised by this case (Case No. PUR-2019-00148)?

There are different ways to file comments on this case with the Commission. An Order for Notice and Comment in Case No. PUR-2019-00148, will be issued by the Commission. The Order will provide notice to the public along with a period of time when comments can be filed in the Case (instructions are provided). In addition, comments can be mailed directly to Joel H. Peck, Clerk, State Corporation Commission, c/o Document Control Center, P.O. Box 2118, Richmond, Virginia 23218-2118. Interested persons desiring to submit comments electronically may do so by following the instructions on the Commission's website: <https://www.scc.virginia.gov/case>. Any comments should refer to **Case No. PUR-2019-00148**, to ensure the comments are recorded in the correct proceeding at the Commission.

COMMENTS IN CASE NO. PUR-2019-00148, WRITTEN OR SUBMITTED ELECTRONICALLY, ARE DUE ON OR BEFORE MAY 13, 2020.

Who can I contact with any questions?

Yes, if you have questions during the processing of Case No. PUR-2019-00148 contact Sheree King at 804-371-9707; or toll-free within Virginia at 1-800-552-7945 (select Option 4 for the Division of Public Utility Regulation and ask for Sheree).