

511: A Summary of the FCC's Report and Order

The U.S. Department of Transportation's petition to establish a national three digit dialing code for traveler information was granted by the Federal Communications Commission on July 21, 2000 in a Report and Order¹, which assigned 511 as an abbreviated dialing code for travel information services.

The FCC's order makes seven specific points in the assignment of 511. They are:

1. 511 is assigned to government entities for both wireline and wireless telephone services.
2. Technical details of implementation and cost recovery are left with Federal, State, and Local transportation agencies to determine.
3. Federal, State, and Local transportation agencies are to determine the type of information to be provided.
4. Federal, State, and Local transportation agencies are encouraged to ensure that 511 transcends municipal boundaries and is appropriate to the national designation of the number.
5. Transportation agencies are encouraged to determine uniform standards for providing information to the public.
6. U.S. DOT is encouraged to facilitate ubiquitous deployment of 511.
7. The FCC will assess the deployment of 511 in 2005 to determine if the number is in widespread use.

The FCC order very deliberately allows broad discretion on the part of State and local transportation agencies in the implementation of 511. However, the FCC also makes it clear that the 511 number will belong to public agencies, not the private sector. Thus, a private provider of traveler information cannot obtain direct use of the 511 number. This means that State and local governments can use the private sector to provide the service, but only under the auspices of the public entities. In addition, the public agencies are responsible to determine the type of information that will be provided by 511.

Paying for the 511 services is left to the State and local agencies to determine. This is not a mandated public service. Therefore, the telecommunications companies are entitled to recover their costs, and State and local agencies could charge the public for these calls.

The assignment of 511 is nationwide and the FCC expects that the service will be available to the entire traveling public. However, the Commission realizes that this nationwide deployment will take time. The FCC uses the term "national scope" in discussing 511, while many in the transportation community interpret "national" to mean "federal". This is not the intent of the FCC. The U.S. DOT has been encouraged to facilitate deployment; not mandate it nor regulate it. Thus, the U.S. DOT is providing support to this coordination activity, and has announced the 511 conversion program to

¹ Third Report and Order on Reconsideration, CC Docket No. 92-105; Federal Communications Commission; Adopted, July 21, 2000; Released, July 31, 2000.

assist in the conversion of existing traveler information systems using seven or ten digit telephone numbers..

The FCC encourages "uniform standards" for the implementation of 511 to the benefit of the traveling public. Again, the FCC did not imply that it was necessary to have "standards" sanctioned by a national Standards Development Organization, such as the IEEE or AASHTO. The term was meant to encourage a degree of uniformity to make the 511 service easy to use by the public as they travel across the country.

Finally, the FCC will look at the deployment of 511 in 2005 to determine if there is widespread deployment of 511. The three digit dialing codes, 211 through 911, are scarce resources. Thus, if the number is not being used the FCC could reassign the number to another use. However, there are no reporting requirements on 511 deployment inferred in this statement. The U.S. DOT will keep the FCC informed about the status of deployment to satisfy this requirement of the FCC.