

Basics of Area Code Relief Planning

NANPA, as a neutral third party, is responsible for forecasting the exhaust of geographic area codes and initiating the process known as area code relief planning. Below is a high level summary of this process.

The relief planning process starts with NANPA projecting the exhaust of an NPA. Area code exhaust occurs when all the prefixes (also known as central office codes) are assigned. Each area code contains 1,000 prefixes, but those prefixes beginning with a “zero” or “one” (a total of 200 prefixes) are not permitted. Further, prefixes such as 411, 911 and other “N11” codes (a total of eight codes) are used for special purposes, leaving 792 prefixes available in each NPA. When all of these prefixes are assigned, another area code is needed. NANPA publishes its forecasted exhaust of all of the area codes on a semi-annual basis. The forecast is used in determining when to start the process of adding another area code.

Three years prior to the forecasted exhaust date for an NPA, NANPA identifies various alternatives to introduce the new area code, either by splitting the current area code and introducing a new NPA or by overlaying a new area code on top of the existing geographical area. Using these alternatives as a starting point, NANPA convenes the service providers operating in the affected NPA together to review and decide which method they wish to recommend to the state regulatory authority. Additional relief alternatives may be identified during these meetings. Once the telecommunications industry reaches consensus on a particular relief plan, NANPA files this recommendation on behalf of the industry in the form of a petition with the state regulatory authority.

The state regulatory authority is responsible for making the final decision concerning the NPA relief method to be implemented. The state may conduct public meetings to get input from the general public on the various forms of relief. NANPA may participate in these meetings and provide assistance in explaining the options available. Once the state makes its decision on the type of NPA relief to be implemented (i.e., a split or an overlay), NANPA assigns the new area code.

With the relief method identified, the final step is implementation. NANPA will conduct an initial implementation meeting with the telecommunication companies – this time to determine when to implement the new area code. Issues such as dates and times for changing the dialing plan (known as permissive dialing) and determining when prefixes can be assigned from the new NPA are addressed. Specifics concerning the plan for implementing the new NPA are published in a NANPA Planning Letter. Often included in the planning letter is a rate center map of the new area code. The NANPA Planning Letter is posted on the NANPA website and serves notice to the telecommunications industry and general public that a new area code will be introduced.

The relief planning process is described in detail in the document entitled *NPA Code Relief Planning and Notification Guidelines*, ATIS-0300061, which can be found on the ATIS website at http://www.atis.org/01_committ_forums/INC/inc_docs.asp.