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MassDOT to drop 617 phone numbers for 857-DOT lines; eventually will save agency \$420k yearly

Posted by Matt Rocheleau August 9, 2012 06:26 PM

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

As part of a move to reduce its yearly phone bill and upkeep costs by nearly half a million dollars, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation is rolling out new phone numbers that begin with 857-368 – or 857-DOT.

The state transportation department will drop its longstanding land-line digits that begin with the 617 area code and are followed by one of three exchanges: 973 for the state's highway and executive divisions; 351 for the Registry of Motor Vehicles and 263 for the now-defunct Massachusetts Turnpike Authority, according to spokeswoman Sara Lavoie.

The current numbers are leased at above-market rates and include expensive phone bill fee, maintenance and relocation costs that the agency will be able to shed by transitioning to a single area code and exchange the department has bought and now owns, officials said.

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The savings will total \$422,000 annually, the agency says. But making the switch costs \$1.5 million, much of which is new equipment costs, so the department will not start to see a return on its investment until just over three years, according to Lavoie.

“Transportation Reform continues with 857-DOT,” Richard A. Davey, the department’s secretary and CEO, said in a statement. “We are replacing the antiqued and redundant telecom systems of the RMV, Turnpike, MassHighway and Executive Office of Transportation to realize significant savings and improve customer service.”

The plan to switch to new numbers – a project known internally as “One Voice” – has been in the works for several years and includes a plan to run more of the phone operations in-house to save money, officials said.

About two years ago, the state purchased 10,000 numbers, at a relatively low cost, within the 857-368 area code and exchange.

MassDOT-issued cell phone numbers and department lines with other Massachusetts area codes and exchanges will not change, officials said.

The new numbers will phase in across the department that employs about 10,000 people, Lavoie said. Calls will be able to be placed to existing phone numbers as well as to newly-issued numbers for a few months, before the old ones shut down, Lavoie said.

Eventually the existing numbers will either be re-rented or sold by their owner and could return to the pool of available numbers.

For example, the 617-351 and the 617-263 numbers are expected to eventually be added to the list of assignable numbers, meaning they could be designated to anyone opening a new line, she said.

But, the 617-973 numbers – including the one Lavoie spoke on for this story – are owned by a man in Florida, she said. The spokeswoman said she does not know his name or more about him, but the department expects he will rent the numbers to someone else or sell them.

The Registry of Motor Vehicles’ headquarters in Quincy has already made the

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switch.

Last week, the registry's Call Center, which receives an average of 45,000 calls per month regarding customer-service business, plugged in its new number, 857-368-8000, or 857-DOT-8000.

The new 857 call center number is being advertised throughout August inside registry branches, on the T and on digital billboards the state's Highway Division uses

Those promotional efforts were produced in-house by state transportation officials and paid for through the department's annual operating budget.

Like the registry call center's old 617 number, the new 857 number should be dialed by those calling from outside of the state or from Massachusetts area codes 617, 339, 781 and 857. The call center number that should be dialed from all other Bay State area codes has not changed; it is 800-858-3926.

The call center has also launched a new line for the hearing impaired: 857-368-0110.

In addition to the motor vehicle registry's phone line, is its website, www.mass.gov/RMV, where more than two dozen online customer service transactions can be performed, officials noted.

The 857 area code was one of four new area codes introduced to Eastern Massachusetts in 2001 to accommodate a surge in telecommunication demand. It covers the same territory as 617.

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