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**Iowa DOT and Iowa State Patrol Launch New 511 Travel Info  
Phone Service and Winter Road Conditions Web site**

Iowa's Travel Info Source  
Dial 511 or 800-288-1047  
Winter Road Conditions: [www.iowaroadconditions.org](http://www.iowaroadconditions.org)  
511 Phone Service Info: [www.dot.state.ia.us/511](http://www.dot.state.ia.us/511)

AMES, Iowa – In an emergency, dial 911 for help. Want a phone number? Call 411. But if you're looking for travel information, call 511.

Beginning Nov. 22, 2002, travelers in Iowa will have an easier way to get around-the-clock, changing winter road condition information. By simply dialing 511, travelers will be able to access Iowa's first voice recognition travel information service.

Transportation, public safety and telecommunications officials were in Ames Friday to introduce the new 511 phone service and winter road condition Web site. The announcement was broadcast via the DOT's videoconferencing network to regional sites in Des Moines, Mason City, Cedar Rapids, Sioux City, Atlantic and Fairfield.

"511 provides a safety net for those who travel on Iowa's interstate and U.S. highway routes," said Michael Jackson with the Iowa Department of Transportation's Research Bureau. "It offers travelers easy access to information valuable for both pre-trip planning and en route decision making."

"We believe the enhancements to both the voice and Internet systems will provide the motoring public with the best information possible as they make their travel plans," said Captain Darrell Cox, the State Patrol's communication officer. "With a 50-plus year history of providing this type of information, we are extremely excited to continue our partnership with the Iowa DOT to provide this service."

## **ENHANCED SAFETY**

The decisions made by motorists in advance of their trips or while en route can be life saving. The new 511 service and road condition Web site allow motorists to make critical decisions before leaving home, like postponing a trip when road conditions are deteriorating.

When in their vehicles, travelers can dial 511 and find out about current road conditions along their route. Aided by this information, motorists can determine whether conditions are suitable for continued travel.

## **NEW NUMBER**

511 is an easy-to-remember number and shortcut to the 10-digit 800-288-1047 road condition number, which has been used by the Iowa State Patrol for many years. The 800 number will continue to be available for out-of-state callers and those without 511 access from their phone companies.

## **REVAMPED WINTER ROAD CONDITION WEB SITE**

To support easier access to critical travel information, the State Patrol has redesigned its winter road condition Web site - [www.iowaroadconditions.org](http://www.iowaroadconditions.org) – to offer more descriptive winter road condition information. In addition, U.S. routes and portions of some state highways have been added throughout the state to increase the effectiveness of the report.

In recent years, motorists received general information regarding Iowa's highway conditions. For example, - "I-80 in eastern Iowa is 75 to 100 percent snow and ice covered." With the new system, motorists will see/hear more detailed and meaningful messages, such as: normal, wet, partially covered, mostly covered, completely covered, travel not advised, or road closed. Explanations of these new road condition phrases are available on the DOT's 511 information Web site at [www.dot.state.ia.us/511](http://www.dot.state.ia.us/511).

## **WHERE DOES THE INFORMATION ORIGINATE?**

The Iowa Department of Transportation's Condition Acquisition and Reporting System (CARS) is the technology behind the scenes, processing the information and sending electronic messages to the 511 computer-generated voice system and Patrol's winter road condition Web site.

This winter, state troopers from across Iowa will provide the Patrol's five communications centers with up-to-the-minute surface conditions throughout the state. The communications centers will then enter this information into CARS. Next spring, DOT personnel will be entering information into CARS pertaining to road construction and maintenance activities.

## **VOICE RECOGNITION**

Iowa's 511 service uses a voice recognition system, allowing for hands-free operation.

Callers must speak slowly and distinctly for the voice recognition feature to function properly. If 511 fails to recognize a caller's response, it will default to a touch key system.

The Iowa Department of Transportation and Patrol encourage motorists to use their wireless phones responsibly and safely, preferably not while driving. Remember, non-emergency parking along the interstate is illegal.

### **HOW 511 WORKS**

511 is easy to use. Dial 511 or 800-288-1047. A computer-generated operator will answer the call. The operator will ask the caller if they want road weather, regional or statewide conditions. From there, the computer guides the caller through the system. Helpful tips on successfully navigating the system, in addition to several shortcuts, are available on the DOT's 511 information Web site.

### **PART OF A NATIONAL EFFORT**

Iowa is one of several states to launch its 511 service after the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) was petitioned by the United States Department of Transportation to designate 511 as a nationwide number for travel information.

Those states that have already activated 511 service include: Kentucky (northern part of state), Ohio (City of Cincinnati), Nebraska (statewide), Utah (statewide), Virginia (regionally, I-81 corridor), Arizona (statewide), Florida (regionally, in the City of Orlando, and Miami, West Palm Beach, Dade, Broward and parts of Monroe counties), Minnesota (statewide), Washington (statewide), and California (San Francisco Bay area). Several other states plan to launch their service, along with Iowa, this month.

### **PARTICIPATING TELECOMMUNICATION CARRIERS**

More than 200 wireline, wireless and pay phone companies provide telecommunication services in Iowa. Many of these companies have volunteered to make 511 available to their customers as a public service.

Significant credit goes to the Iowa Telecommunications Association and Rural Telephone Association for encouraging their members to participate. A list of participating companies is listed on the DOT's Web site.

Some telecommunication companies are still in the process of making the switch to 511. Others have chosen not to provide 511 service to their customers. If Iowans experience difficulty reaching 511 from their phones, they should contact their service provider directly for assistance. The telecommunications customer service numbers are also listed on the DOT's Web site.

Iowans who do not have access to 511 can still call 800-288-1047. Out-of-state callers must use the 800 number to access Iowa's travel information.

### **PBX**

Many businesses and some home offices have their own telephone systems. These systems switch calls between internal users and external telephone lines. These systems are called Private Branch Exchanges (PBX).

Most PBX systems require the user to dial a single digit access code (typically and "8" or "9") to reach an outside line. For callers to dial 511 directly, without entering the access code, a switch must be made in the company's phone system.

Since 511 is a new service, it's to be expected that some businesses will need time to make the switch before 511 calls can be made directly by their employees. In the meantime, callers may still dial 511 or the 800 number after entering their access code.

### **STATE'S INVESTMENT IN PUBLIC SAFETY**

The Iowa Department of Transportation is part of an eight-state consortium sharing in the \$900,000 investment required to design and develop 511. In addition to Iowa, participating states include Minnesota, Alaska, Kentucky, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Vermont.

The estimated annual cost of \$250,000 to operate 511 is being provided by the Iowa Department of Transportation. Eighty percent of those costs are covered by federal technology funds. The remaining 20 percent is supported by state highway funds.

### **COST TO USERS**

As a public service, Iowa's wireline telecommunication companies are providing 511 to their customers at no charge. Wireless phone users will be responsible for normal airtime and roaming charges, in accordance with their wireless service contracts. Pay phone users will pay the minimum 35- to 50-cent local call fee.

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