



## Questions and Answers

### Q: What is 511?

**A:** 511 is America's new, easy-to-remember travel information telephone number. 511 will replace and consolidate a proliferation of travel information telephone numbers around the country estimated at more than 300. For example, at last count there were 11 different travel information numbers serving interstate traffic between Washington, D.C. and New York City.

### Q: What's so important about 511?

**A:** 511 offers one, easy-to-remember number. Regardless of the traveler's location, 511 gives travelers' choices - choice of time, choice of mode of transportation, choice of route – which save lives, time and money.

### Q: How did 511 get started?

**A:** On March 8, 1999, the U.S. Department of Transportation petitioned the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to designate a nationwide three-digit telephone number for traveler information. This petition was formally supported by 17 state DOTs, 32 transit operators, and 23 metropolitan planning organizations and local agencies. On July 21, 2000, the FCC designated "511" as the single traffic information telephone number to be made available to states and local jurisdictions across the country.

### Q: When did Iowa become involved?

**A:** Eight states, from Alaska to Maine, pooled resources and expertise to develop the 511 voice-enabled phone service for travelers. Led by the Iowa Department of Transportation, the multi-state consortium received \$700,000 from the Federal Highway Administration to help pay for system design and software development. Each state also provided a 20 percent matching fund, boosting total funds to nearly \$900,000. In addition to Iowa, the participating states are Alaska, Kentucky, Maine, Minnesota, New Hampshire, New Mexico and Vermont.

### Q: How soon will 511 be available nationwide?

**A:** The FCC ruling leaves nearly all implementation issues and schedules to state and local agencies and telecommunications carriers. There are no federal requirements; and there is no mandate for 511 implementation. While several states, highway corridors and cities already have 511 service, many states are still planning their 511 deployments. By 2005, a nationwide "footprint" is expected.

### Q: What area does Iowa's 511 service cover?

**A:** 511 is offered statewide in Iowa, and covers the interstate, U.S. routes, and portions of some state highways. It does not include county roads or city streets. Eventually, this service may be expanded to other roadways.



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### Q: How can I access Iowa's 511 information?

- A:** Information from Iowa's 511 system is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week via:
- ◆ wireless phone by dialing 511 or 800-288-1047 (within Iowa);
  - ◆ wireline phone by dialing 511 or 800-288-1047 (within Iowa);
  - ◆ pay phone by dialing 511 or 800-288-1047 (within Iowa); or
  - ◆ any phone dialing 800-288-1047 nationwide.

### Q: How does the phone system know the location from which I am calling?

**A:** The phone system identifies your telephone prefix when calling from a wireline phone. It identifies the communications tower that your wireless phone is connected to at the time you place the call. Knowing the location you are calling from allows the 511 system to provide information specific to that area of the state first.

### Q: What type of information is available?

**A:** Weather-related road condition information will be available from Nov. 22, 2002, through March 15, 2003. Information is added only when conditions change. If Iowa roadways are not being impacted by the winter weather, you will most likely hear a message that roads are "NORMAL." For updates on statewide weather conditions, as collected from the Iowa Department of Transportation's Road Weather Information System and Aviation Weather Observations System sites, visit [www.DOTWeatherView.com](http://www.DOTWeatherView.com). In March 2003, information regarding Iowa road construction and maintenance projects will be posted. Information will be updated as new work is started or completed, or travel conditions change. 511, both in Iowa and nationally, is an evolving travel information service. As additional resources become available, Iowa's system may be expanded to include information regarding transit routes, tourism and community events, traffic incidents, emergency services, bridge embargoes, etc.

### Q: How much does a call to 511 cost users?

**A:** 511 is a public service of the telecommunications industry and state of Iowa. There is no charge to Iowa wireline users. Wireless users will pay normal airtime and roaming charges, according to their wireless service contracts. Pay phone users are responsible for the 35- to 50-cent minimum toll fee. Some 511 services offered in other states may charge the caller for premium information such as tourist information, special events, parking locations and lot status, trip routing and planning, etc. The caller will be notified of any charges.

To offer your suggestions or comments, visit the DOT's 511 Web site at [www.dot.state.ia.us/511](http://www.dot.state.ia.us/511).



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### **Q: What should I do if I have trouble using 511 from my wireline or wireless phone?**

**A:** Contact your phone carrier directly for assistance. Not all telecommunications companies serving Iowa offer 511 to their subscribers/customers. Information regarding service availability and customer service numbers is posted on the DOT's Web site at [www.dot.state.ia.us/511](http://www.dot.state.ia.us/511).

### **Q: What if I have trouble dialing 511 from my work phone?**

**A:** Many businesses 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, a switch must be made in the company's phone system. Contact your supervisor or employer to find out if this switch has been made. Until the switch is made, you may call 511 after first dialing the required single digit access code.

### **Q: How often is the information updated?**

**A:** Winter road condition information is updated by Iowa State Patrol officers on an ongoing basis, as conditions change.

### **Q: Can I get information about a specific road?**

**A:** Yes. You may access weather-related road conditions for specific roads.

### **Q: Haven't I seen this information before?**

**A:** The Iowa State Patrol has provided winter road condition information in the past. The enhanced service being offered now provides for abbreviated 511 dialing, voice recognition, new road condition terminology, and easier-to-navigate Web pages.

### **Q: What happened to the State Patrol's 800 road condition phone number?**

**A:** 511 is an abbreviated, easier-to-remember version of the traditional 800 number. If 511 service is not available through your wireline or wireless carrier, you may still call 800-288-1047. The 800 number can also be used when calling from out of state.



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### **Q: Where does the information originate?**

**A:** A computer-based system known as CARs, or the Condition Acquisition and Reporting System, is working behind the scenes processing the information that is entered by the Patrol or other sources. After that information is entered, it is routed to the 511 phone system where it is automatically converted from text messages to audio messages. Currently, winter road condition information is entered in CARs by the Iowa State Patrol, based on observations made by their officers as they travel throughout the state. Obviously, officers are not able to cover all designated routes at the same time. But, they continue to enter information as conditions change and they travel different roadways. Next spring the Iowa Department of Transportation will be entering data into CARs about statewide road construction and maintenance projects.

### **Q: What is 511's relationship to 911?**

**A:** 911 is used to report emergencies, the need for police or medical attention. 511 is a traveler information number.

### **Q: How is 511 different from radio and TV news?**

**A:** 511 is another information source for travelers that compliments radio and television broadcasts. It is coded to the specific routes the caller is interested in; that kind of user-specific information not given over broadcast media. Generally, there is 10 times as much information available than what can be given in a 30-second news slot.

### **Q: What is the role of the wireless phone in making calls to 511?**

**A:** The Iowa DOT's and Patrol's most important priority is safety. Our programs and efforts are directed toward improving safety and saving lives. The preference is that motorists call 511 from home, work or other point of origin, prior to departure. If a wireless phone is used en route, we urge motorists to call from a rest area, fueling station or other appropriate stopping point along the way. As a reminder, it is illegal to park your vehicle on the shoulder of an Interstate highway for non-emergency purposes.



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