

## **GSM, CDMA players fight over 11-digit No.**

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NEW DELHI: Consumer interests have become sandwiched in an industry war between incumbent GSM operators and Reliance and Tatas over the DoT's decision to implement 11-digit numbers by adding an extra 9 to all mobile numbers in the country by January 1 2010.

GSM operators are unhappy about the move, and have made detailed presentations to the government on why such a move is harmful for the industry and consumers. This representation has been made through the COAI while AUSPI, which primarily represents the interests of Tatas, Reliance and Sistema, is in favour of moving to a 11-digit numbering plan.

COAI says the move to a 11-digit numbering plan implies that over 480 million mobile subscribers will have to re-write their numbers and update personal contact lists. Further, SIM cards will have to be upgraded as the current SIM cards are linked to the existing 10-digit numbering plan. They also warn that it would require a major upgrade for billing systems, which imposes additional costs across the board for all operators.

In summary, COAI argues that the entire value proposition is very expensive and not in the consumer interest. It favours the use of the entire level 9 for PLMN, as this will create an additional capacity of 600 million subscribers. The COAI points out that there are only 40 million fixed line subscribers in the country with hardly any new growth foreseen.

Under the circumstances, reserving levels 2,3,4,5,6,7, and 8 for fixed line is unreal and blocks out way too many precious resources. They seek the release of levels 7 and 8 specifically, in addition to level 9, for introducing a new mobile series. It is estimated that with these three series, a billion plus subscribers can be served without the need for any fresh allocation of levels.

AUSPI, on the other hand, says China already uses a 11-digit numbering plan and that ITU (world body for telecom specifications) also permits such a move. It argues that 11-digit numbers are mobile number portability compatible.

On costs, AUSPI cites research to establish a cost of no more than Rs 2 crore per operator to upgrade to a 11-digit code, while the entire upgradation can occur within a period of 2 to 3 months. There is clearly commercial incentive for the two sides as incumbent GSM operators believe that they will be able to address the market and their consumers interests better by retaining the 10-digit series starting with 9 and introducing two additional ones at 7 and 8.

AUSPI thinks that a 11-digit numbering plan will open up opportunities to migrate subscribers from the incumbent operators networks since a mandated change in numbering plan could also be accompanied by a relatively easier decision to change

network.

With contradicting views on an issue which impacts consumers, it is unclear whether the DoT will be able to proceed at the same pace as it desires. At this time, it seems that the political leadership and the bureaucracy is backing a 11-digit mobile numbering plan to be launched as early as January 2010.