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Let's accept 724 area code and move on

New area codes are being created all over the United States, but nowhere is there as much moaning, groaning and whining about it than in southwestern Pennsylvania.

The 412 area code, which used to cover all of southwestern Pennsylvania, has been split. Now, the 724 will be the area code for most of that same region, leaving Pittsburgh and most of Allegheny County with the 412 area code.

The boundary between the two area codes runs right through the North Hills and splits Franklin Park, McCandless and Hampton.

The new area codes are necessary partly because of the increased use of mobile phones, fax machines and computers linked to the Internet. Also, new rules for competition in providing local phone service allow companies to reserve huge blocks of three-digit exchanges for phone numbers, so even though all the phone numbers aren't used up, the exchanges are being held in reserve.

But the resistance to adapting to a new area code seems to be just another manifestation of our region's resistance to change. Or perhaps it's a corollary to the pervasive NIMBY (not in my back yard) syndrome. In the case of the area code complaint, it's NIMPE — not in my phone exchange. These folks are saying it's OK to have a new area code. They just don't want the boundary between the old and new to run through their back yards.

Business owners in the Wexford area are so upset they have filed a petition asking the PUC to again reconsider the area code boundaries. They are concerned that customers will be confused by the new area code or that customers will think they will be charged long-distance tolls for calling into the new area code.

Sure, there's bound to be a little confusion about a change in the area code. But there is no change in long-distance charges. Calls that are free now will remain free once the new area code kicks in April 30.

Businesses and residents along the area code border should get used to the idea and deal with it. Businesses that are fighting the change probably will spend more money in lawyer's fees than it would cost them to send a nice letter to customers explaining the changes. And don't forget the taxpayer money the PUC will be spending to defend itself.

After a long and well-publicized debate about the form of the new area code, it's time to get used to the idea and move on. It won't be too many more years before the next new area code is added.