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Number Porting in Canada: CRTC Rules and Timelines

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How number portability works in Canada

In Canada, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) decides whether a carrier must let you take your phone number to a competitor, and on what terms. It did this through a series of telecom decisions, not one porting statute. For a business, three things follow from those decisions. Most local numbers are portable. The number has to stay tied to its original exchange (the local calling area it belongs to). And the official porting intervals are short, but they cover only "simple" ports.

The obligation began with landlines. In *Local Competition*, Telecom Decision CRTC 97-8 (1 May 1997), the CRTC opened local phone service to competitors and ruled that "all LECs will be required to implement local number portability." A LEC is a local exchange carrier: the incumbent phone company or a competitor offering local lines. Mobile numbers followed later. Telecom Decision CRTC 2005-72 (20 December 2005) gave wireless carriers access to the porting systems and directed Bell Mobility, Rogers Wireless and the mobility division of TELUS to offer wireless number portability by 14 March 2007 in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario and Quebec, where landline portability already existed.

This article summarizes those decisions as of October 2026. It is educational information, not legal advice. For your own case, check the current decision text and your providers' terms.

Who must port, and what a carrier cannot refuse

The CRTC framework puts the obligation on carriers, and which carrier you are leaving matters:

- **Wireline local carriers.** Under Decision 97-8, every LEC must implement local number portability (LNP).
- **Local VoIP providers that are LECs.** In Telecom Decision CRTC 2005-28 (12 May 2005), the CRTC decided that local VoIP service is regulated as local exchange service. It also held that the 97-8 requirement to implement LNP "applies to LECs providing local VoIP services". Telecom Decision CRTC

2016-345 restates this. The same 2005 decision notes that local VoIP *resellers* get their numbers and number portability through the LECs they buy from. A small VoIP brand may therefore port through an underlying carrier, not directly.

- **Wireless carriers.** Decision 2005-72 directed Canadian carriers to port numbers according to the porting scenarios it adopted. Those scenarios cover wireless-to-wireless, wireline-to-wireless and wireless-to-wireline moves.

What a carrier *can* refuse is mostly geographic (see below). The decisions reviewed here do not say whether a losing carrier may hold a number because the account owes money. We found no CRTC text on unpaid balances, so treat that as an open question for your provider, not a settled rule. In the United States, by contrast, the FCC's consumer guide says the old company cannot refuse to port "even if you owe money for an outstanding balance or termination fee". That is a US statement and does not bind Canadian carriers.

Porting intervals: two business days and 2.5 business hours

These are the figures on the CRTC record. They were set in 2005 and confirmed in 2008. We found no later decision that changes them, but carriers' real-world times vary, and the intervals apply only to simple ports.

Port type (simple ports)	Interval on the record	Source
Landline to landline (LEC-to-LEC stand-alone)	Two business days	2005-72, recounting Decision 2003-48
Wireless to landline, or landline to wireless ("intermodal")	Same as LEC-to-LEC, "currently two business days"	2005-72
Wireless to wireless	2.5 business hours	2005-72
Intermodal ports in small incumbent carriers' (SILECs') territories	Two business days	2008-122
Complex ports (any combination)	Negotiated case by case between carriers	2005-72

Some details from the decisions are worth knowing:

- **Intermodal follows wireline.** Decision 2005-72 tied the intermodal interval to the LEC-to-LEC interval. If the landline interval ever changes, the intermodal one changes with it. Carriers may also set a different interval "by mutual agreement".
- **Wireless-to-wireless is tighter.** The CRTC set 2.5 business hours and said this interval "may only be modified by mutual agreement." By its own breakdown, that time is the whole transfer: two hours, plus half an hour for the carriers to exchange information and enter the port in the porting database.
- **Resellers and MVNOs.** A wireless reseller or mobile virtual network operator (MVNO) gets the 2.5-hour interval only if it can pass customer information to its underlying carrier in time. If it cannot, the two sides negotiate an interval, capped at the intermodal one.
- **Small incumbents.** In Telecom Decision CRTC 2008-122 (18 December 2008), small incumbent carriers asked for at least three business days for intermodal ports. The CRTC refused. It confirmed that the industry's LEC-to-LEC interval "is two business days" and concluded that two business days "is

appropriate for the SILECs".

Two cautions for a business owner:

1. **The clock starts after the paperwork is accepted.** The intervals measure carrier-to-carrier processing. They do not count the time spent gathering bills, fixing an address mismatch or waiting for your approval. A provider's published estimate is usually longer. Twilio's Canadian porting guidelines, for example, quote 5-7 working days once all documents are in, and longer if the current provider rejects the request.
2. **Business ports are often not "simple".** Several lines, or one line split off a larger account, can make a port complex and push it into case-by-case negotiation. Our guide to how long number porting takes explains where the time goes.

Wireless, wireline and VoIP combinations

Decision 2005-72 set out how each combination works on location, not just on timing:

From → To	Can it move?	Location rule
Wireless → wireless	Yes	Allowed "regardless of a subscriber's physical location or billing address", as long as the number keeps its original exchange designation
Landline → wireless	Yes	Number must keep its original exchange / rate centre designation
Wireless → landline	Usually	The landline carrier may "accept or deny" the port if your service location is outside the number's exchange area
Landline → landline (including local VoIP from a LEC)	Yes	Within the number's exchange (the location rules below)

The first three rows come straight from 2005-72. 2016-345 summarizes them the same way. The last row reflects 97-8 and 2005-28 together with the exchange rule.

Moving a main number from a cell phone to a hosted phone service is a wireless-to-wireline port: smooth inside the number's exchange area, refusable outside it.

Geographic limits: exchange and rate centre

Canadian numbers belong to an **exchange**, and each exchange is tied to a **rate centre** used to rate calls. The CRTC has kept the exchange "central to the porting process", as 2016-345 puts it. A ported number keeps its exchange designation. Wireline-based carriers keep discretion when a former wireless customer's location sits outside that exchange.

To see which exchange and rate centre a number belongs to, and whether that exchange is marked portable, use the Canadian Exchange Area Listing published by the Canadian Numbering Administrator. It lists province, area code complex, exchange area, rate centre and a "Portable" indicator. The data comes from service providers' tariffs, and where the list and a tariff differ, "the tariff should be considered correct."

What this means for you:

- **Moving within the same exchange is usually fine. Moving to another exchange usually is not**, at least for a landline-type number. The new provider has to serve that number's rate centre.
- **A new provider may simply lack coverage.** Twilio notes that "in rare cases" it may not have rate-centre coverage for a particular Canadian number (Twilio Canada guidelines). Run a portability check before you cancel anything.

The Metro Vancouver exception

There is one exception to the exchange rule. In Telecom Decision CRTC 2016-345 (26 August 2016), the CRTC approved a TELUS application for a special **location porting zone** covering 17 Metro Vancouver exchanges. Inside the zone, subscribers can keep a landline number when they move to an address in a different exchange. The exchanges are Bowen Island, Cloverdale, Fort Langley, Haney, Ladner, Langley, New Westminster, Newton, North Vancouver, Pitt Meadows, Port Coquitlam, Port Moody, Richmond, Vancouver, West Vancouver, Whalley and White Rock. The CRTC directed carriers to implement the zone within three months of the decision.

The same day, in Telecom Decision CRTC 2016-346, the CRTC denied a request from consumer groups to widen local number portability boundaries across the country. Its reasoning: "it would not be appropriate to expand location portability in Canada, aside from within the Metro Vancouver area".

Telecom Decision CRTC 2019-23 (29 January 2019) approved industry updates to the Central Office Code (NXX) Assignment Guideline to reflect the Metro Vancouver zone. That is the operational follow-through. It did not extend location porting anywhere else.

So, as of October 2026 and based on the decisions reviewed, a business moving from Vancouver to Richmond is in a different position from one moving from Ottawa to Gatineau. The first stays inside the special zone. The second leaves its exchange (and, in this example, its province).

What to prepare for a Canadian business port

The CRTC sets intervals and obligations. The paperwork comes from the providers. Here is a checklist based on one provider's published Canadian requirements (Twilio Canada guidelines). Your new provider's list may differ slightly.

Before you submit

- [ ] **Do not cancel the old service.** The port is matched against the losing provider's live account.
- [ ] **Confirm the number is portable** to the new provider (rate-centre coverage, exchange, Metro Vancouver zone if relevant).
- [ ] **Get your account number** from the current provider. It is usually on the bill or in the online portal.
- [ ] **Ask whether a PIN is required.** Twilio notes that most mobile operators require account numbers and PINs to port, and some providers also require a PIN to port out.
- [ ] **Have a copy of your most recent bill.**

- [ ] **Confirm the service address** on file. Twilio's Canadian letter of authorization must show the actual Canadian service address, which must match the current provider's records.

When you submit

- [ ] **Sign the letter of authorization (LOA)** close to submission. Twilio requires the LOA to be dated within the last 30 days.
- [ ] **List every number** you are moving, and say whether any numbers stay behind on the old account.
- [ ] **Watch for an approval text.** Twilio warns that for Canadian ports you must approve within 90 minutes of receiving the port approval SMS from the losing provider. If you don't, the port is rejected. Make sure the person holding that phone knows it is coming.

After the port

- [ ] **Test inbound calls** from an outside line, a mobile and a landline.
- [ ] **Close the old account only after the number works** on the new service, and check the final bill.

Toll-free numbers and fraud notes for Canada

Toll-free. Canadian toll-free numbers are portable. Twilio's Canadian guidelines list them alongside geographic and mobile numbers. They do not belong to an exchange, so the rate-centre limits above do not apply. They move through a different process from local numbers, so ask the new provider how it handles them.

Port-out fraud. In the United States, 47 CFR 52.37 requires wireless providers to "use secure methods to authenticate a customer" before carrying out a port-out request. As of October 2026 that rule is not yet enforceable: paragraph (h) says compliance "will not be required until this paragraph is removed or contains a compliance date", no compliance date has been announced, and the FCC's 2026 regulatory agenda lists the next step as "Undetermined" (eCFR, 47 CFR 52.37(h)). Carriers may already apply these checks voluntarily. We did not find a Canadian equivalent: no CRTC decision reviewed for this article sets port-out authentication rules. In Canada, protection depends on each carrier's practices, such as account PINs and the SMS approval step described above. Our research note on port-out fraud and SIM swaps covers the risk in more detail. For a business number, the practical steps are the same either way: set an account PIN, limit who can make changes on the account, and treat any unexpected porting text as an alarm.

FAQ

Do I lose my number if I cancel my old service first?

You may. A port is a request against an active account at the losing provider, matched on account number, address and sometimes a PIN. Once the account is closed, there may be nothing left to port. The FCC's consumer guide gives the same advice for the US: do not end service before starting with the new company. Keep the old service running until the number works on the new one.

Can I port a landline number to a VoIP service?

Generally yes, if the VoIP provider (or the carrier behind it) can serve the number's exchange. LECs offering local VoIP carry the same portability obligation as other LECs under 2005-28. The limits are geographic: the number has to stay in its exchange, except within the Metro Vancouver zone.

How long does it really take?

On paper, a simple intermodal or landline port is two business days, and a simple wireless-to-wireless port is 2.5 business hours (2005-72). Those are carrier processing intervals from 2005 and 2008. They start only once a clean request is accepted, and complex ports are negotiated case by case. Provider estimates are longer: Twilio quotes 5-7 working days for Canada after documentation is complete. Plan around the paperwork, not the interval.

More on moving a Canadian line is on our Canada page. Auto Attendant moves Canadian numbers by hand: you sign the LOA online, the earliest port date you can request is eight days out, and nothing is charged until the number has moved (how porting works).

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Source links

Links cited in this article, in order of first appearance. Full addresses are provided for readers using extracted text.

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About Auto Attendant

Auto Attendant gives a small business one phone number and a recorded menu that sends each caller to the right person. The call rings the mobile that person already carries, using their normal dialler and their normal mobile plan. Pricing is a single flat monthly fee for the whole company rather than a charge for each user, and there is no app, desk phone or hardware to install.

One number, one menu, the phones you already own

A caller dials the business number, hears a short greeting and chooses an option. Each option can ring one mobile, ring several at once so whoever is free answers first, or try people one after another in a set order. There is no limit on how many people sit on the receiving end, because nobody is billed per seat. Setup is done by the owner in a few minutes: pick a number, write the greeting, and point each option at a mobile.

What it deliberately is not

An auto attendant routes a call; it does not answer one. Nobody at Auto Attendant speaks to callers, and no AI stands in for a receptionist. A business that wants its calls handled, messages taken and appointments booked wants an answering service, which is a different product at a different price. A business that needs call recording, queues, agent dashboards or CRM integration wants a contact centre platform. Auto Attendant is for the case where the call should simply reach the right pocket.

Keeping personal numbers off the internet

The business number is the only number a caller ever sees. Personal mobile numbers are never displayed and never given out, which is what lets an owner put a number on a website, an invoice, a van or a Google Business Profile without handing a personal line to everyone who finds it. An existing advertised number can be ported across and kept, and the old line keeps working while the port is in progress.

Work with Auto Attendant

Visit Auto Attendant to see how it works, how it compares to a personal mobile, Google Voice and a full phone platform, and the current pricing.

Telephone number portability, emergency calling and caller-ID rules differ by country and change over time. Articles published here describe general practice and cite primary regulator and carrier sources; they are not a guarantee of any timeline, and they are not legal or regulatory advice for a specific business.

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