



511 Traveler Information

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511 Traveler Information

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Getting the most up-to-date travel information in Kansas is as easy as calling 5-1-1. By calling “511” on any phone (wire line and wireless) from anywhere in Kansas you can learn about road conditions, construction detours and travel weather information for the Kansas Turnpike and any Interstate, US, or state highway in Kansas and Nebraska. You can reach Kansas 511 from anywhere in the U.S. or Puerto Rico by calling 1-866-511-KDOT (5368) or if dialing 511 doesn’t work from your phone.

511 Website (<http://511.ksdot.org>)

This website provides you:

- A Kansas map that shows road condition and construction/detour information (KanRoad)
- A link to “511 Travel Info” that offers:
 - General Information about the 511 phone system
 - User Information/Tips
 - Frequently Asked Questions
 - Contact Information for 511 Help
 - A link to www.safetravelusa.com, which provides Kansas weather information and road and weather conditions for Nebraska, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota and Minnesota

511 Traveler Information



Kansas 511: The Statewide Advanced Traveler Information System

On January 15, 2004, the Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) launched 511, a new statewide advanced traveler information service. By calling “511” on any phone, travelers can hear up-to-date, route-specific road conditions, construction detours and travel weather information for Interstate, US, or state highways in Kansas, and the Kansas Turnpike. Information is also provided for Nebraska (the only adjacent state with a 511 system). Phone numbers are provided for similar information in other surrounding states. **511** prompts callers to select the route and road segment they want by saying the route number or using their phone’s keypad.

Kansas 511 addresses some of America’s greatest concerns about safe travel. According to recent research, motorists consider weather-related travel information most important followed by accident or road incident reports, construction updates, and major highway congestion.

In Kansas, the **511 number** has **replaced the toll-free statewide Road Condition Hotline (1-800-585-ROAD)** that provided pre-recorded regional road/weather information. Now, anyone who calls the Road Condition Hotline will be rolled to the **511** system. KDOT has placed **511 signs** along Interstate and other state highways to inform travelers about the new service.

Kansas’ **511** initiative is part of a program to establish **511** as the nationwide Traveler Information Number. The 511 system is a partnership that includes, but is not limited to, KDOT, the Kansas Highway Patrol, the Kansas Turnpike Authority, and the state’s local telephone and cellular service providers. The Kansas 511 system can also be reached from anywhere in the U.S. or Puerto Rico by calling **1-866-511-KDOT (5368)**.

511 should not be confused with 911, the nationwide emergency response number. Any situation requiring police or highway patrol, fire department, ambulance, or other emergency services must still be reported to 911, which is operated by trained public safety dispatchers.

For further information about 511, contact Barb Blue, Advanced Traveler Information System (ATIS) Coordinator, Kansas Department of Transportation, Eisenhower State Office Building, 700 SW Harrison Street, Two-West, Topeka, KS 66603-3754, 785-291-3818, bblue@ksdot.org.



Fact Sheet

- **What is 511?**
511 is the new, easy-to-remember telephone number for travel information
- **How was 511 established?**
In July 2000, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) assigned 511 to government entities for landline and wireless telephone services for travel information services. The goal is for each state to have 511, with similar information available in all states, and all of the state systems to become interconnected.
- **What kind of travel information does 511 provide in Kansas?**
Automated, near real-time, route-specific road conditions, construction detours, and travel weather (both current and forecasted) information for Interstate, US, or state highways in Kansas and the Kansas Turnpike. Travelers can also request information for Nebraska State Highways (the only neighboring state with 511). As other states adjoining Kansas deploy 511, access to their information will also be provided. Kansas 511 also broadcasts active AMBER, General Transportation or Homeland Security Alerts.
- **When can I call 511?**
You can call anytime—24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year.
- **Can I call 511 from anywhere in Kansas?**
You can call Kansas 511 from anywhere in Kansas on a landline or cellular phone. Cellular phones near the state's borders may be routed to towers that serve surrounding states. If dialing 511 doesn't work from your phone, you can call 1-866-511-KDOT (5368) from anywhere in the U.S. on either a landline or cellular phone to reach Kansas 511.
- **How does 511 work?**
Just call 5-1-1 from any phone to be connected to a computerized voice message system. When prompted, you can say the route number or use your phone's keypad to request route-specific information. 511 information is also available on the internet at <http://511.ksdot.org> or www.safetravelusa.com.
- **Is there a charge for 511?**
Information is provided free of charge (or no more than the cost of a local call) from a landline phone. For cellular phone users, the call might count against their minutes, but no roaming fee should be charged.
- **Other Facts about 511 in Kansas**
 - 511 began in Kansas on January 15, 2004. Kansas was the 17th state to offer the service with statewide information.
 - 511 in Kansas replaced the Road Condition Hotline (1-800-585-ROAD) on June 30, 2004. Anyone calling the hotline number will be rolled directly to 511.
- **How does 511 benefit travelers?**
 - 511 offers more and better information with easier access for the caller
 - 511 provides a consistent approach to delivering travel information across America
 - Travelers can use 511 to make informed travel choices
 - Weather alerts can warn drivers about potentially dangerous storms in their area so they can take appropriate action



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Q: Who is in charge of 511?

A: The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) is in charge of Kansas 511, although there are many stakeholders, for example, the Kansas Highway Patrol, Kansas Turnpike Authority, etc.

Q: How does the information from 511 differ from the travel information I get on the radio and television?

A: With 511, you can get much more route-specific information than you can get from a 30-second news broadcast, and you'll be able to get the information whenever you need it, for where you need it. The weather information on 511 is travel-related and concerns the road's surface and travel condition.

Q: How does the information available from 511 differ from the travel information I have received from the Kansas Road Condition Hotline (1-800-585-ROAD)?

A: With 511, you can get automated, near real time road condition, construction detour and travel weather information for the route(s) of your choice whenever you need it, for wherever you need it. Information on the Road Condition Hotline was provided regionally and was pre-recorded, so the information may or may not have been what you wanted. Also, the information was not as timely.

Q: Can I still call the Road Condition Hotline (1-800-585-ROAD)?

A: The Kansas 511 system has replaced the Road Condition Hotline. If you call the hotline number you will be automatically rolled to 511.

Q: Can I call 511 from a cell phone?

A: Yes—most wireless companies let you reach 511; however, there may be places where you experience poor reception which prevents access or a good connection to 511. For your safety, please don't call 511 while you're driving. If you have difficulty reaching 511 from your cell phone, try calling the alternate toll-free number, 1-866-511-5368. If you need additional assistance, you may contact the Kansas ATIS Coordinator at bblue@ksdot.org or at 785-291-3818 during KDOT business hours (8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday).

Q: Can I call 511 from anywhere in Kansas?

A: Yes.

Q: How can I call the Kansas 511 System if I'm not in Kansas?

A: You can also call Kansas 511 from any landline or cellular phone from anywhere in the U.S. and Puerto Rico by calling 1-866-511-KDOT (5368).

Q: What do I do if I can't reach 511?

- A: Try calling the alternate toll-free number, 1-866-511-5368. It should work from anywhere in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. There could be several reasons why you might not reach 511:
- First, your phone provider might not “recognize” 511 and you should contact the 511 Project Manager at KDOT (see contact information) so they can contact your phone company.
 - Second, if you're using a cellular phone, you may have poor reception from a “no reception pocket.” Try calling from another location.
 - Third, if you are calling from a cellular phone and are close to the state borders, you may be routed to a cellular tower that is not programmed to the Kansas 511 System.

Q: If I want 511 in other states or locations, how do I get it?

- A: You can access most state 511 systems by calling a toll free number like the Kansas 511 system. These numbers are available from the state departments of transportation and may be printed on state maps. The goal is to have traveler information in all states accessible by calling 511. This is what makes 511 a national system—every state's travel information number would be 511 and travelers can easily access information as they travel from state to state. Of course, if you are in other states and call “511” you will reach the local 511 service.

Q: If I call 511 in other locations (states), will it be the same as in Kansas?

- A: It might be different. The intent is for all 511 systems to provide similar types of information; however, there may be some differences in system design. In some states, the system will be very similar to Kansas 511, such as in Nebraska, because the systems were built by the same company.

Q: How often is the system information updated?

- A: The system checks for updates every five minutes. Updated information is processed for broadcast to 511 within 5-10 minutes.

Q: What highway routes does 511 provide information for?

- A: 511 provides information for all Interstate, US and State Highways (K Routes) in the Kansas State Highway System, as well as all Kansas Turnpike routes. For longer routes, information is provided in segments of about 60 miles each.

Q: Why isn't construction/detour information provided on 511?

- A: It is; however, you need to listen to the full report provided for the route/segment you choose. The route/segment “reports” you hear will provide road condition information, followed by construction/detour (if any occurs within the segment), followed by weather/forecast information.

Q: During storms, why does 511 only provide information about routes affected by the storm?

A: During major storms, storm advisories may be placed on 511 to provide you quick information about those routes affected by the storm. When this occurs, you must listen to the advisory and cannot interrupt it. If you want to get **complete information for any route**, stay on the line and you can choose the **route and segment** you want by following the menu.

Q: Why doesn't 511 understand what I say?

A: The Kansas 511 system is very sensitive to background noise that may cause it not to recognize what you tell it. If you have this difficulty, we recommend that you use keypad commands. KDOT is aware of this issue and is working to improve it. We appreciate your patience.

Sometimes you may hear "I'm sorry, I didn't understand you" for other reasons. The 511 system is set so you have to respond to the menu prompt in a certain amount of time. If you do not respond in the time allowed, the voice will say, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand you" to let you know it did not receive your selection. You may also hear this message if the system does not recognize your selection. If the system does not prompt you to select again, say "Back" and it will take you back to your last menu selection to repeat your request.

Q: Why doesn't someone contact me the same day when I leave a comment?

A: Your comments are recorded and sent to KDOT the following morning. After that, we try to return calls as soon as possible. If a large number of comments have been received, it may take a few days.

Q: I'm hearing impaired. How can I get 511 information?

A: Call 711 and the 711 relay operator will assist you. You can also get information provided on 511 at the 511 website (<http://511.ksdot.org>).



Tips/Information for Using 511

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I. General/System

A. Interacting with the System (Using Voice/Keypad Commands)

- You can get information from the 511 System by using your voice or your phone's keypad (from a touch-tone phone). Simply follow the menu prompts with voice commands, or to use keypad commands, just respond to the prompts by using your keypad. If you use the keypad, you can return to using your voice with the next menu selection if you'd like.

B. Voice Recognition

- The voice recognition is very sensitive to background noise. This may cause the system not to recognize what you tell it. We suggest that you reduce background noise such as radio, TV, talking, open windows, etc., while using 511. If you can't reduce or avoid background noise when calling and you have trouble with 511 recognizing your voice commands, we suggest that you use your keypad.
- Sometimes you may hear "I'm sorry, I didn't understand you" for other reasons than background noise. The 511 System is set so you have to respond to the menu prompt in a certain amount of time. If you do not respond in the time allowed, the voice will say, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand you" to let you know it did not receive your selection. You may also hear this message if the system does not recognize your selection. If the system does not prompt you to select again, say "Back" and it will take you back to your last menu selection to repeat your request.

C. Responding to System Prompts

- As soon as you hear the road segment you want, you can select it and not wait until you have heard all the segment prompts. This shortens your call time and prevents you from listening to information you don't need or want.

NOTE: The only exception to this is when an Amber, Homeland Security or General Transportation Alert message is active. You must listen to the full Alert information. When there is an Alert, you will hear the information right after the opening message.

D. Selecting Routes/Segments

- It helps to know the route(s) you would like information about before calling. Kansas 511 gives route-specific information for Interstates, US, and Kansas highways and the Kansas Turnpike. Since most routes (highways) have a number of segments, once you request a route, you will be asked to select the segment(s) for which you want information. For example, Interstate 70 segments include Kansas City to Lawrence, Lawrence to Topeka, etc. Segments are about sixty (60) miles long.
- The 511 system menu provides the options of **#1 – Kansas Turnpike** (which reports only Turnpike routes/segments) or **#2 – Kansas Highways** (which reports all Interstate routes, including the Turnpike). Therefore, to obtain full interstate information, you should select option **#2** (Kansas Highways).

E. Using 511 if you are Hearing Impaired

- If you are hearing impaired, call 711 and a relay operator will assist you.

II. System Menu (user interface)

511 is designed to be as simple for you to use as possible. Here is what you will hear and use to request information:

1. Opening/Welcome Message for Kansas 511

- #### 2. Alert Information (Active as needed):
- 511 provides information as needed for AMBER Alerts, General Transportation Alerts (such as weather/storm advisories) and Security Alerts (such as hazardous spills). You will only hear Alerts as they are happening. When an Alert is active, you must listen to it and cannot interrupt it.

NOTE: Storm advisory alerts will only provide you information for highway routes affected by the storm. If you want to know about other routes/segments, stay on the line and you can choose the route/segment you want by following the steps below.

3. Selecting a Route (highway):

- For **Kansas Turnpike System**, press or say **1** (includes turnpike segments only)
- For **Kansas Highways**, press or say **2** (includes interstate segments and the turnpike)
- For **Nebraska Highways**, press or say **3**
- For **road/weather information in other neighboring states**, press or say **4** (you select from the options)
- Say the highway number or press the highway number followed by the # sign (you select)

4. Selecting a Route Segment—you will hear a list of the segments on your chosen route and you can select your segment by following the prompts as follows:

- a. When you hear your segment described, **select it by pressing or saying 1**. You will **hear** road condition, construction and weather information for your selection(s)
- b. If the highway has only one segment, you will hear the information in “a” above

5. When your report is finished, you will hear one of two different menus:
- a. For Single Segment Highways, you will hear:
 - To **repeat** the message, press or say **1**
 - To begin a **new road/weather information search**, press or say **2**
 - To leave a **comment**, press or say **8**
 - To **end this call**, press or say **9** or simply hang up
 - b. For Multiple Segment Highways, you will hear:
 - To **repeat** the message, press or say **1**
 - To begin a **new road/weather information search**, press or say **2**
 - To select **another segment from this route**, press or say **4**
 - To leave a **comment**, press or say **8**
 - To **end this call**, press or say **9** or simply hang up
- Make your selection—follow the system prompts*

NOTES:

- If you do not respond within a certain time, you will hear, “I’m sorry, I didn’t understand you” to let you know your selection was not received.
- Be sure to follow the voice prompts to get the information you want. 511 can’t understand sentences if you try to talk to it.
- 511 is designed for you to ask for the information you want by specific route and segment. By following the menu prompts you can receive the information you want immediately. If you request information on the comment line, you will not receive information for at least a day (see next bullet).
- If you request help or information on the Comment Line, it will be at least a day before we can listen to your request and respond. Please leave your name and phone number if you want us to call you. 511 does not know your phone number.

III. Navigating 511

Just say one of these simple commands at any time to navigate 511:

- **“Main Menu”** – takes you back to the main menu
- **“Back”** – allows you to navigate backward through the system
- **“Repeat”** – to repeat your menu options
- **“Help”** – to get help in using the system

IV. Help Menu

The Help Menu has been divided into different sections that follow the system menu.

A. If you say “Help” before selecting a route, you will hear:

“For Kansas Turnpike system, press or say 1.

For Kansas highways, press or say 2.

For Nebraska highways, press or say 3.

For road weather information in other neighboring states, press or say 4.”

After you’ve made your selection, you will hear:

“The Kansas 511 System was designed to provide you with information about various conditions that could affect your travel decisions. To make a menu selection, say or press the appropriate zero through nine. To provide everyone with an opportunity to access this information, you are restricted to eight reports during a call. The system includes voice

commands to ease your navigation. You may say “help” at any time to receive instructions for your current menu. To hear your current menu’s options again, simply say “repeat.” Saying “back” will allow you to go backwards through the menu. Saying “main menu” will return you to the beginning menu. At the end of each report you will be provided an opportunity to leave a question or comment for the system administrators.”

B. If you say “Help” when selecting a route, you will hear:

“You are asked to select a specific highway for this menu. Currently, Interstates, U.S., and State highways are included. You may say the highway number or enter the highway number on your telephone keypad followed by the pound sign. To improve understanding when speaking your request, you may include road descriptions, such “Interstate,” “U.S.,” or “Kansas,” followed by the highway number.”

C. If you say “Help” after hearing a report, you will hear:

“You are offered the opportunity to repeat the last report, access another report, leave a question or comment, or end the call. On multiple segment highways you are also offered an option to select another segment along the same highway. Please select one of the options provided by saying or pressing the appropriate zero through nine to make your selection.”

D. If you say “Help” at any other time, you will hear:

“Please select one of the options provided by saying or pressing the appropriate zero through nine to make your selection.”

V. Message Formats

Once you have selected a segment, you will hear a message or “report.” Be sure to listen to the entire road condition report for your segment, in case there are varying conditions along the segment that you should know about. The message will repeat the route and segment to confirm your selection. If it is not correct, say “back” and make a new selection.

Each message or “report” includes the following:

A. Road conditions*—refers to the weather-related condition of the road surface:

- As of (Time)—you will hear the road conditions as of the most recent time they are available on the day you are calling. For example, “*road conditions as of 9 am, . . .*” ***Since the report is near real time, you won’t hear the date.***
- Condition reported by exception—*since the 511 segments include multiple highway reporting segments, multiple conditions may actually exist within a 511 segment. Reporting by exception means you will hear the primary condition first, followed by the other road condition reports within the segment selected. For example, 511 Segment on I-35 between Kansas City and Ottawa: “road conditions as of 9:00 a.m. are normal, seasonal, except between Ottawa to Williamsburg, conditions are icy.”*

- This is followed by a general advisory that drivers should be alert to changing conditions.

B. Construction, Detours, Projects, or Roadway Events*: In the event any of these activities are occurring, you will hear, “The following construction projects and/or events are in place:”

- A listing of the activities follows that includes: location, travel effects (for example, detour, lane closures, width restrictions, traffic management, such as pilot car, temporary signals, temporary roadways, etc) and expected time delays through the work zone.

- Currently, reports are listed for construction or maintenance events, flooding events, and some emergency incidents only and do **not** include those due to traffic congestion.
- Activities that do not affect traffic flow through the work zone may not be reported. Also, short-term projects lasting 1-2 days are generally not reported.
- **Note:** You must listen to the road condition report before you will hear this information. If you do not hear any of this information after the road condition report, it means there is no current activity on the route/segment you selected.

***NOTE:** Road condition information will be reported first during winter months (October through March) and Construction/Detour/Roadway Events will be reported first during other months (April through September). Weather information will always be reported last.

C. Weather Forecast

- You will hear current weather conditions and a forecast that is valid until the expiration time given. Forecasts are provided for 6-hour blocks of time and are updated at least hourly. They include:
 - **Sky cover** (For example, “Overcast changing to partly cloudy.”)
 - **Visibility** (For example, “Visibility will be five miles changing to one mile.”)
 - **Precipitation** (For example, “Light rain changing to freezing rain.”)
 - **Winds and Temperatures** Since the winds and temperatures can vary along your segment, they are given as a range:

Winds and wind gusts (For example, “Winds will be 10-12 miles per hour from the northwest changing to 15-18 miles per hour from the north/northwest with gusts to 25 miles per hour.”)

Temperatures (For example, “Temperatures will range from 20-23 degrees changing to 45-49 degrees.”)

As types of weather information are added, the format of the weather messages may change.

- **NOTE:** You must listen to the road condition and construction/detour information provided before you will hear this information

VI. Route/Segment “Reports”

- The beginning and end points for routes and segments are described by landmarks (for example, city, town, junctions, etc)
- Most route segments are listed in order from west to east and from south to north. So, the first segment you hear will be the segment that is farthest west or south. Segments are reported in consecutive order. Due to state geographics and population, there are some exceptions as follows:
 - I-70 segments are listed from east to west.
 - I-35 from Kansas City to Emporia, I-135, and Turnpike I-35 from Topeka to Emporia are reported from north to south.
- **Concurrent Routes:** Some routes have two numbers, such as US-50/US-400, so information is listed for both highways. You can request one or both routes to hear the information you want.

- **Entire Routes:** Interstate routes also give you the option to select the “entire route” and it is the first choice in the menu. Road conditions and weather for entire routes will be reported in less detail than smaller segments.
- **Turnpike Segments:** You can select **Kansas Turnpike** routes separately from **Kansas Highway** routes. The **Turnpike** menu contains only those routes operated by the Kansas Turnpike Authority (KTA). For routes, such as I-70 and I-35, that contain both Turnpike and highway (or toll-free) segments, all segments are reported in **both** the **Turnpike** and **Highways** menus.)

User Tip: If you want information about turnpike routes only (such as I-35 or I-70, you should request the **Turnpike** menu. If you want to know about Turnpike routes and other highways, you should request the **Kansas Highways** menu.

VII. System Comment Line

We want to hear your comments and **questions about 511**. Please say your name and phone number if you would like a return call. For emergency help, call 911. **Do not leave emergency calls for help on the comment line.**

Your comments are recorded and sent to KDOT the following morning. After that, we try to return calls as soon as possible. If a large number of comments have been received, it may take a few days.



Contact Information

For More Information about Kansas 511, contact:

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