

Consultation

Post-implementation temporary maintenance schedule review

Consultation opens: 23 February 2017

Consultation closes: 2 March 2017

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1 Executive summary

1.1 Background

On 19 August 2016 Smart DCC Ltd (DCC) consulted with Parties to the Smart Energy Code (SEC) on its intention to implement a temporary maintenance schedule in place of the SEC provisions relating to Planned Maintenance for a limited period¹. These arrangements were intended to address comments raised by some SEC Parties regarding how DCC would manage the unpredictable volume of potential issues which may arise following DCC Live.

With broad support from SEC Parties and with the agreement of the SEC Panel, DCC has been using the temporary maintenance schedule since DCC Services went live on 8 November 2016. DCC agreed to review the maintenance schedule after four months and seek an extension if necessary. This consultation forms part of that review.

1.2 Proposal

DCC proposes to make a request to the SEC Panel that the temporary maintenance schedule is extended for a further six months until August 2017. DCC considers that this extension is necessary because there has not yet been sufficient usage of DCC Services in the production environment to give DCC full confidence that a majority of the potential issues which could arise have been identified and fixed. We also consider that it would be prudent to extend the arrangements to accommodate any further issues that arise following the implementation of R1.3.

In addition to this extension, DCC proposes the following changes to the maintenance schedule based on our initial experience of how the current arrangements have performed so far:

- Instead of using two maintenance windows of two hours each, DCC proposes to use a single window of no more than six hours in duration; and
- Instead of commencing no earlier than 00:01 and ending no later than 06:00 on the same day, the maintenance window will commence no earlier than 20:00 and end no later than 08:00 the following day.

All other details of the temporary maintenance schedule will continue to follow the current arrangements, including the requirement for DCC to notify Users, Registration Data Providers (RDPs) and the Technical Architecture and Business Architecture Sub-Committee (TABASC) five Working Days in advance of using a maintenance window. A comparison of the SEC requirements, the current arrangements and the proposed revised arrangements is provided in table 1 below.

¹ <https://www.smartdcc.co.uk/consultations/dcc-consultations/temporary-maintenance-schedule-and-bcdr-testing/>

Table 1	SEC	Current arrangements	Proposed arrangements
Maximum Maintenance time each month	6 hours	18 hours	18 hours
Number of maintenance windows each week	Not specified	2	1
Maximum duration of each maintenance window	<6 hours	2 hours	<6 hours
Days when Maintenance may take place	Not specified	Tuesday and Friday (if required)	Tuesday or Friday
Earliest maintenance window start time	20:00	00:01	20:00
Latest maintenance window end time	08:00	06:00	08:00
Amount of notice provided	20 Working Days	5 Working Days	5 Working Days

2 Post-implementation temporary maintenance schedule

2.1 The need to extend the temporary maintenance schedule

When preparing for the provisions of live services through Release 1.2, DCC carefully considered the volume and type of issues that may arise, and put measures in place to allow any remedial work to be carried out with minimal disruption to DCC Services.

However, due to the scale and complexity of DCC Systems, DCC anticipates that there will be an unpredictable volume of issues which will only come to light when Users start to exercise services in the production environment. In addition to this, DCC considers that it would be prudent to extend the arrangements to accommodate the release of R1.3 in April 2017, which will introduce additional functionality to DCC Systems. Furthermore, it is also possible that the end-to-end Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery (BCDR) tests due to take place in June 2017 will highlight further issues which will need to be addressed.

DCC considers that the provisions for Planned Maintenance in the SEC are unlikely to provide sufficient flexibility to address all issues arising during this period in the most appropriate manner, and as a consequence, it is necessary to extend the temporary arrangements for an additional six months, and seek industry views on this proposal. As Part of this proposal, DCC intends to review the need to continue with the maintenance schedule after four months and, if DCC believes the schedule needs to be extended beyond six months, will consult further with SEC Parties.

Q1

Do you agree that the temporary maintenance schedule should be extended for a further six months until August 2017? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.

2.2 Proposed changes to the frequency, timing and duration of maintenance windows

2.2.1 Frequency

Although there has been limited exercising of services in the production environment to date, DCC has nonetheless been resolving low severity defects on the production platform identified during testing. In so doing, DCC has only used a single maintenance window each week, and therefore proposes to reduce the permitted number of maintenance windows from two per week, to one per week.

Q2

Do you agree that the frequency of maintenance windows can be reduced to one window each week? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.

2.2.2 Timing

DCC has received feedback from Users highlighting that they have designed their systems and support processes around maintenance windows that run overnight from 20:00 and 08:00 in accordance H8.3(a) of the SEC, and that DCC should seek to align with this requirement at the earliest opportunity. In light of this feedback we propose to move the maintenance windows so that they commence no earlier than 20:00 and end no later than 08:00 the following day.

Q3

Do you agree that the weekly maintenance window should commence no earlier than 20:00 and end no later than 08:00 the following day? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.

2.2.3 Duration

DCC has used just under 20% of the maintenance windows available to date. Two-thirds of the maintenance activities that DCC has needed to undertake have taken less than two hours to complete, with the remaining third requiring around six hours to complete. Based on this experience, DCC proposes to increase the maximum amount of time permitted for each maintenance window to six hours, which aligns with the maximum amount of continuous maintenance time that the SEC allows.

DCC proposes that the total amount of maintenance time allowed each month remains at 18 hours. Whilst this would prevent DCC from using six hours during every weekly maintenance window being proposed, it would ensure that the total monthly maintenance period is not extended versus the current arrangements.

Q4

Do you agree that the duration of maintenance windows should be increased to six hours? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.

2.3 Summary of DCC's proposal

- Instead of the maximum time allowed for Planned Maintenance being six hours each month, DCC proposes to maintain a maximum of eighteen hours of outage time each month until August 2017
- These eighteen hours of outage time will be allocated to a single maintenance window each week. Each window will be no longer than six hours in duration
- Each window will commence no earlier than 20:00 every Tuesday or Friday and will end no later than 08:00 the following day
- DCC shall test each fix in the Pre-Integration Testing (PIT) and Systems Integration Testing (SIT) test environments in sequence. If a need is identified for Users or Registration Data Providers (RDP)s to participate in testing they will be invited to undertake testing in the User Integration Testing (UIT) environment prior to the fix being implemented in live DCC Systems
- DCC shall undertake an assessment of the need to make use of a maintenance window and will notify Users, RDPs and the TABASC five Working Days in advance as to whether a window is to be used or not. The notice will provide the time that any suspension to DCC Services will commence and cease, along with information regarding the nature of any work being carried out
- Whenever the nature of a fix impairs DCC's ability to queue and manage communications during an outage, DCC will also notify users five Working Days in advance of that maintenance window and will request that Users do not send or trigger any communications to DCC Systems for the duration of the outage. DCC will allow all communications sent prior to the start of the outage to pass through DCC Systems before suspending DCC Services. If the Communications Hub loses its connection with DCC Systems, Alerts will be queued within the Communications Hub and will be sent once DCC Services are restored
- Once DCC services are restored, communications will be processed on a 'first received first processed' basis with no priority being given to any particular type of request
- If a window and contingency time does not provide sufficient time for work to be completed and DCC extends the duration of the window in order to complete the work, the extension will be treated as Unplanned Maintenance and Parties, RDPs and the TABASC will be informed in accordance with the provisions under H8.6 and H8.7 of the SEC. Such extensions will only be used when DCC decides (and can justify) that completing the work is less disruptive to Users and RDPs than any alternative course of action

3 Consultation questions

1. *Do you agree that the temporary maintenance schedule should be extended for a further six months until August 2017? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.*
2. *Do you agree that the frequency of maintenance windows can be reduced to one window each week? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.*
3. *Do you agree that the weekly maintenance window should commence no earlier than 20:00 and end no later than 08:00 the following day? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.*
4. *Do you agree that the duration of maintenance windows should be increased to six hours? If you do not agree, please set out your reasons.*

3.1 How to respond

Please provide responses by noon on 2 March 2017 to DCC at contact@smartdcc.co.uk. If you have any questions about the consultation documents, please contact contact@smartdcc.co.uk.

Consultation responses may be published on DCC's website. Further, DCC may refer to responses in its consultation conclusions, which will appear on DCC's website. Please state whether all, or any part, of your consultation response is confidential. Please note that responses may be made available to the SEC Panel.

If you have questions about our approach to consultations, please contact our Regulation Manager at Robin.Healey@smartdcc.co.uk.