



August 22, 2012

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FCC report: Nearly half of W.Va. residents don't have access to broadband

By [Eric Eyre](#)

CHARLESTON, W.Va. -- West Virginia ranks last in the nation for people with high-speed Internet, according to a new federal report.

About 845,000 West Virginians -- or 46 percent of the state residents -- don't have access to broadband Internet service, the Federal Communications Commission reported this week.

Dan O'Hanlon, chairman of the state Broadband Deployment Council, said he was surprised about West Virginia's ranking. The state has recently posted online broadband coverage maps that show a significantly higher percentage of West Virginians have access to high-speed Internet.

"Although this study doesn't reflect the data we have, it does highlight that there's still work to be done in West Virginia," O'Hanlon said Wednesday. "The governor and Legislature has told us not to stop until 100 percent of the citizens and businesses in West Virginia have access to broadband."

The report - based on data from June 2011 - also showed that even West Virginians with broadband have Internet speeds far slower than most states.

Other states with limited broadband access were Montana (27 percent), South Dakota (21 percent) and Alaska (20 percent).

Nationally, about 6 percent of Americans lacked access to high-speed Internet.

The FCC report concluded, "Broadband is not yet being deployed in a reasonable and timely fashion."

The lack of broadband is greatest in rural areas, according to the FCC report.

In West Virginia's rural communities, 60 percent of people can't get high-speed Internet, compared to 31 percent in non-rural areas.

The FCC report examined only "fixed" broadband access - high-speed Internet delivered by satellite and wireless signal wasn't included. The report also categorized "broadband" as an Internet service with a download speed of 4 megabits per second or faster.

"For businesses, access to broadband is critical to the ability to participate in the global economy," O'Hanlon said. "For the citizens of West Virginia, it's important that our kids have access to all the rich, education resources that broadband can bring them."

Dana Waldo, who heads Frontier Communications' West Virginia office, said the FCC report used year-old data that "doesn't accurately reflect the broadband picture today in West Virginia."

Waldo said 82 percent of households have access to broadband in the Frontier's West Virginia territory - a 20 percent increase from July 2010. "That means Frontier provided broadband access to more than 130,000 additional household during that time," he said.

Waldo added that Frontier, the largest broadband provider in the state, also has improved Internet speeds - with 4-megabit service available to 76 percent of households in West Virginia.

Paul Miller, an analyst at the West Virginia Center on Budget & Policy, said the state must do more to persuade people to sign up for broadband in places where it's available.

"Most of the attention has been paid so far on infrastructure, but it seems the state is really missing an opportunity by not doing more to promote broadband," said Miller. "It has to be profitable for a business to build out broadband. Unless there are people to subscribe, there's no incentive to build out in the smaller and harder-to-find areas."

Two years ago, Miller recommended that the state establish a state agency to oversee broadband expansion in West Virginia. His suggestion wasn't adopted.

"The state needs to make a top-down commitment to broadband," Miller said. "We need to have the right people, in the right place and in the right job."

In December, the state Broadband Deployment Council plans to distribute \$4 million for projects that bring broadband to rural areas. The grant money also will go to groups that promote the benefits of broadband service.

The state also is spending \$126.3 million in federal stimulus funds to bring fiber-optic cable to schools, libraries, health-care centers and other public facilities.

The U.S. Department of Commerce inspector general is reviewing the state's use of the grant money. Federal auditors from the inspector general's office were in Charleston this week.

Reach Eric Eyre at erice...@wvgazette.com or 304-348-4869.

3 Comments

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Posted By: samlow

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Apparently the Director of Operations for Frontier in West Virginia hasn't left the Charleston area. I live in Clay County where I pay Frontier \$40.00 per month and I can assure you the download speed gets no where near 4 MBPS. We're lucky if we get even 1 MBPS. It has been like this for several years and from where I stand this broadband effort is a joke! They keep touting all the "improvements" they've made and I for one haven't seen any of them. My internet service is SLOW, stability and dependability of the internet system is poor at best and repairs take 2-5 days to occur. Even then you have to call them back again after only 2-3 days because the internet is once again slow or not operating at all. Amazing how many outages there are and they can never tell you what the problem is or how long it will take to get it repaired. When will the Broadband Deployment Council hold Frontier's feet to the fire and MAKE THEM FULFILL the promises made to our citizens? Probably never!

Posted at: August 23, 2012 8:10:00 am

Posted By: Grouse

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Too rural of a population to ever think broadband will be available to those who want it and can afford it.

Posted at: August 23, 2012 10:11:43 am

Posted By: WVFarmGirl

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Actually it's possible for everyone in the state to have ultra fast broadband access and believe it or not requires no new lines to access it either. Broadband over Power Lines ... if you have electricity then you have broadband internet by just plugging your modem into any electric outlet in your house! Amazing huh? Is this new technology? Nope! Only reason all of America doesn't have broadband internet access is because the cable and phone companies are fighting this internet technology tooth and nail! This technology kills the cable and DSL method because it is so much faster! Prime example of how the cable and telephone companies are buying off politicians to keep everyone in the stone age when it comes to internet access!

Posted at: August 23, 2012 6:23:28 pm