



## Broadband Infrastructure: Deployment

Only **32%** of subscriber broadband service is provided by high-speed fiber optics cable.

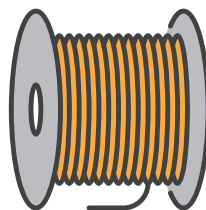
Most U.S. subscribers still rely upon copper-based tech like DSL or cable.



In rural areas, **22.3%** of Americans lack 25/3Mbps home Internet service.

**19 million Americans** (6%)

still lack access to fixed broadband service at even basic threshold speeds.



### Issue background:

FCC's broadband policy dictates how broadband is deployed across America at a time when general demand for broadband service is constantly on the rise. However, the pandemic made telemedicine, home schooling and virtual meeting events part of the "new normal." Ensuring that Americans are connected must be a national priority.

The pandemic demonstrated that America's broadband infrastructure is more important than ever before. Closures of hospitals, schools, and other critical buildings as well as "stay at home" orders highlight the importance of remote-work directives intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

With damaging effects from the pandemic still affecting our economy, ensuring that Americans across the country have access to modern broadband services remains an essential infrastructure objective for Congress.

## FIBER OPTIC INFRASTRUCTURE

Federal dollars that fund broadband deployment projects should be used to install the most effective technologies to provide the best broadband service as possible. Claims that copper-based DSL technologies suffice in providing adequate broadband access by certain carriers are false, and forgiving carriers who provide minimal service to secure federal funding undermines efforts to deploy future-proof broadband. Increased oversight may be needed to ensure that broadband providers do the right thing with federal resources.

The FCC's required speed of 25/3 Mbps is already obsolete. Rising demand requires higher internet speeds, and the coronavirus pandemic underscores the need to provide the best technology available. Fiber optic is that technology, and targeting speeds of 100/100 Mbps will require the use of fiber broadband systems.

## UNIVERSAL SERVICE

NUCA supports reforms to the Universal Service Fund (USF), including broadening the USF contribution base. This would stabilize the USF for the long term and provide the flexibility to raise the revenue needed to meet growing demand for broadband. This will require wireless & broadband carriers to start paying into the USF.

The move by hundreds of thousands of businesses and their employees to work remotely from home using the Internet is taxing the existing capacity of today's broadband infrastructure. Remote workplaces, telemedicine, and "Zoom" meetings are likely to be permanent adjustments, all of which speaks to the need for higher upload target speeds.

## UNPROVEN TECHNOLOGIES

As the FCC develops eligibility criteria for programs such as the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF), NUCA believes that unproven technologies such as "low-earth-orbiting satellites" should not be given the same consideration as fiber, which has decades of usage to back up its reliability and cost structures.

## What is NUCA's position?

NUCA is encouraged by Congress's action this session to treat fiber-based broadband as a segment of our nation's infrastructure security, versus just as a broadband service.

The biggest obstacle of widespread adoption of fiber-based broadband is the cost of constructing and implementing new fiber lines when old systems are still able to serve customers. More federal resources will augment faster speeds, but states sometimes are drawn in by existing service providers to subsidize outdated slower networks that will have to be replaced. Designated faster speeds must be included in legislation to "future-proof" the modernized systems and avoid these legacy service issues.

Policy that only allows for simple repair and refurbishment of antiquated copper systems does not meet any measure of modernizing the American telecommunication system to meet 21st Century information and data requirements.

Broadband policy also dovetails into the industry's existing emphasis on infrastructure damage prevention. Underground facility operators must ensure that facilities are located and marked accurately. Excavators must call 811 before they dig, respect facility markings and dig carefully by pothole during excavation. State enforcement authorities must do their job and fully enforce state damage prevention laws.

## What can Congress do to help?

**Pass H.R. 3684, the \$1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.** It contains \$65 billion in resources to install modern broadband infrastructure systems. These resources will improve speeds, lower access prices, and "future-proof" broadband speeds and systems for years ahead.

**Expand Universal Service Fund Base.** There remains a critical need for legislation to expand the current base that contributes to the Universal Service Fund (USF) has declined over the years. This inevitably has resulted in an increasingly growing contribution gap. Legislation is needed to require wireless and broadband carriers to start contributing into the USF.

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