

West Virginia Broadband Report

September 2017 Overview of Broadband Access



JOE
MANCHIN

UNITED STATES SENATOR *for* WEST VIRGINIA

For West Virginia to compete in the twenty-first-century global economy, we must increase access to broadband to all counties and communities. As the internet continues to play a larger role in our day-to-day lives, West Virginians must not be forced to choose between their hometowns and a reliable, affordable broadband connection.

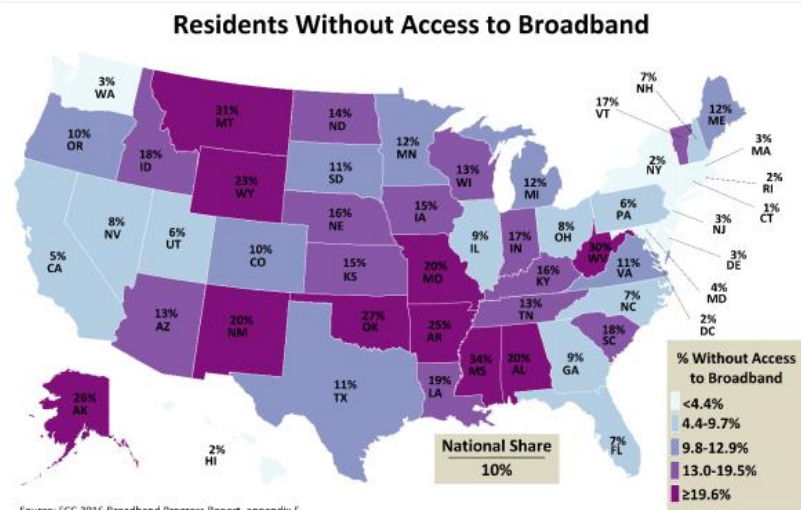
We as a country have made strides over the past decade increasing broadband access across rural America, but there is still much work to be done in West Virginia. This report provides an update on the progress of broadband access in the Mountain State. By connecting our entire state, West Virginia will be able to compete in the worldwide marketplace.

Status of Access to High-Speed Internet in West Virginia

According to the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), over 500,000 West Virginians still do not have access to broadband. The majority of residents in West Virginia without broadband live in rural areas. Estimates indicate that nearly half of rural West Virginians do not have internet that adequately meets the FCC's definition of broadband, compared to 39 percent nationwide.ⁱ

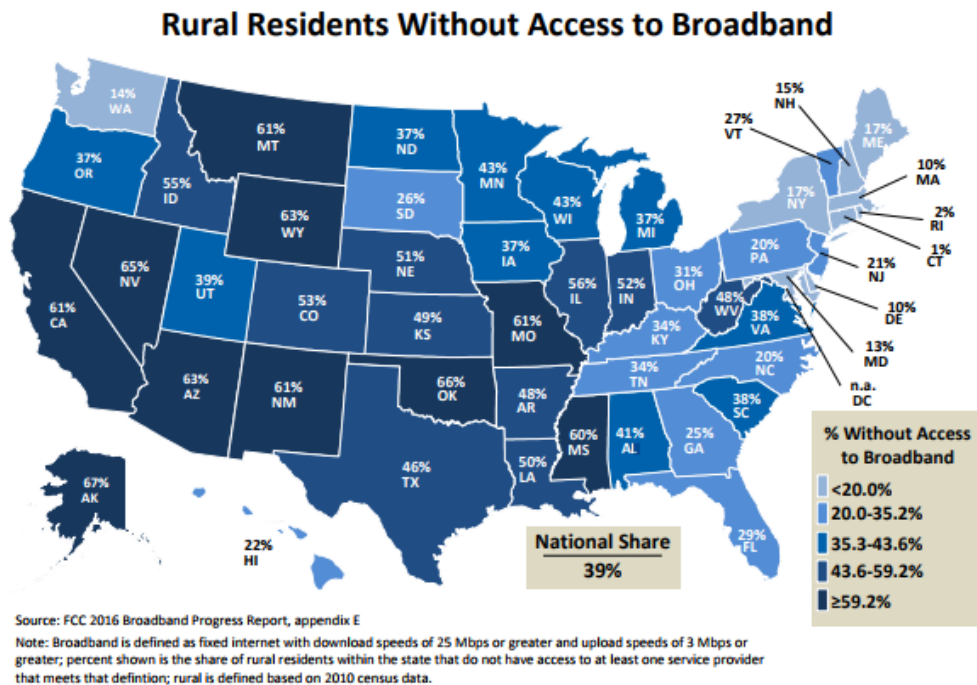
	All Areas		Urban Areas		Rural Areas	
	Pop. Without Access	% of Pop.	Pop. Without Access	% of Pop.	Pop. Without Access	% of Pop.
United States	33,981,660	10%	10,551,623	4%	23,430,037	39%
West Virginia	554,124	30%	92,104	10%	462,020	48%

When compared to the rest of the country, West Virginia has one of the highest rates of residents who do not have access to broadband. Of all 50 states, West Virginia ranks 47th in broadband connectivity with 30% of residents not having broadband access.



West Virginia Urban-Rural Divide

According to the FCC's 2016 Broadband Progress Report, only 61 percent of rural residents have access to broadband. This percentage translates to 23 million Americans. In West Virginia, the figures are worse. 48 percent of rural residents, or 462,020 do not have access to broadband. This is significantly lower than the national average of 39 percent.



Many of the rural residents of West Virginia live in mountainous regions that make deploying high-speed broadband access particularly challenging. Lower population densities also contribute to this challenge; where there are fewer people in an area, there may not be a business case to deploy broadband in these areas without federal support.ⁱⁱ Because of this, I have been working to ensure federal policies provide every American with access to a reliable, affordable broadband connection.

Federal Action

Increasing access to broadband in West Virginia has been one of my top priorities as a Senator. By working together with the FCC and the Executive Branch, Congress can improve broadband access for every American. I led the Congressional effort urging the FCC to move forward with [The Mobility Fund II](#), which will provide \$4.53 billion in Federal support over ten years to expand mobile broadband coverage across the country and the FCC passed it unanimously this August.

[The Rural Wireless Access Act of 2017](#), a bill I proudly introduced with Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), would require the FCC to collect valid broadband coverage data. This requirement will be incorporated into Mobility Fund II and ensure that we expand broadband access throughout West Virginia using coverage data that accurately represents the real-world experiences of West Virginians.

I also sent a [letter](#) with Senator Moran (R-KS) urging the FCC to move forward with the Remote Areas Fund. There are 12,328 locations in West Virginia that fall into the FCC’s “above extremely high-cost” category, meaning they are some of the most rural and remote areas in the nation. Many currently still lack any viable broadband connection. This letter urged the FCC to move forward with the Remote Areas Fund and structure it to successfully reach these West Virginia locations.

Next generation mobile broadband, referred to as “5G”, is estimated to spur \$275 billion in broadband investment. That is why Senator Heller (R-NV) and I introduced the [Rural Broadband Deployment Streamlining Act](#) to streamline the application process required to construct broadband infrastructure on federal lands. It would also take steps to ensure that the broadband data collected for the National Broadband Map is robust and reliable by requiring the Government Accountability Office to examine the accuracy of this data.

I also introduced the [Rural Telecommunications and Broadband Service Act of 2017](#) to form an advisory committee within the FCC to define what ‘access to comparable services in rural America’ should mean. This committee would develop policies and recommendations that promote deployment of broadband access in rural areas across West Virginia.

ⁱ Federal Communications Commission. [2016 Broadband Progress Report](#). January 2016.

ⁱⁱ National Telecommunications and Information Administration. [Broadband Availability Beyond the Rural/Urban Divide](#). May 2013.