

FACT SHEET

August 26, 2015



Broadband Access and Infrastructure

High-speed Internet access – often referred to as “broadband” – is a set of technologies that, taken together, are recognized as a potential catalyst for global economic and social change. As the U.S. Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) recently stated, broadband is...

“a foundation for economic growth, job creation, global competitiveness and a better way of life. It is enabling entire new industries and unlocking vast new possibilities for existing ones. It is changing how we educate children, deliver health care, manage energy, ensure public safety, engage government, and access, organize and disseminate knowledge.”¹

Broadband’s physical infrastructure includes both traditional cable and fiber-optic “wireline” networks (such as those operated by Comcast and Verizon) and wireless networks, including 3G networks (e.g., Sprint, T-Mobile) and 4G networks (Clear and, in the future, Verizon Wireless and AT&T Wireless). “Broadband access” generally refers to the availability of broadband services, as well as the adoption of those services where available. Increasing the availability and adoption of broadband is an important goal of national communications policy, and in particular the FCC’s National Broadband Plan. There are, however, differing views of the appropriate role of government vs. the private sector in increasing broadband access in the U.S.

Overview

These issues arise in discussions of broadband access and infrastructure:

- The appropriate role of government in promoting broadband access and adoption.
- The impact of various forms of economic regulation and social policies on private investment in broadband networks.
- Comparisons of broadband access in the United States vs. other nations.
- The role of the federal government in promoting competition among broadband providers.
- Franchising and licensing broadband networks, and carriers’ use of radio towers, telephone poles, and public rights-of-way, such as conduit under roads.
- The impact of broadband access on economic growth.
- The relative merits of different technology platforms – e.g., wireline (fiber-based, cable) and/or wireless 3G (EV-DO, UMTS, HSDPA) and 4G (WiMAX, LTE) – in delivering broadband to different user groups (homes, public facilities like schools or libraries, small businesses, large enterprise, emergency responders, etc.).
- The use of universal service funds and other subsidies to address instances of market failure and expand availability of broadband, especially in rural areas, and adoption of broadband by underrepresented groups, such as low-income, disabled, and elderly consumers.
- The need for “net neutrality” rules to regulate broadband service (see TAP’s [Net Neutrality Fact Sheet](#)).

¹ FCC [National Broadband Plan, Executive Summary](#), pg. 1

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Media Contact

For media inquiries on a range of TAP topics, or for assistance facilitating interviews between reporters and academics, contact TAP@techpolicy.com.

Broadband Access and Infrastructure Sources

These sources are a good place to start in understanding broadband issues.

[Nicholas Economides](#) summarizes the view that network competition is different from other forms of competition in "[Competition Policy in Network Industries: An Introduction](#)." "[Rethinking Broadband Internet Access](#)," by [Daniel Spulber](#) and [Christopher Yoo](#), looks at broadband competition. And [Tim Wu's](#) paper, "[Subsidizing Creativity through Network Design: Zero-Pricing and Net Neutrality](#)," supports regulation to encourage innovative uses of the Internet.

"The vigor with which the FCC has pursued allegations of improper network management suggests that the regulatory structure may already be in place to ensure that consumers are both protected and able to enjoy the Internet's tremendous promise in the future." [Christopher Yoo](#), quoted in CED Magazine, "[Network Neutrality – Overgovernance in the Digital Age](#)," 7/31/2010

Please note that all links on this fact sheet are accessible from the online version at www.techpolicy.com/broadband.aspx.

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