

Ongoing National Broadband Map Issues

Key Findings:

- While the new National Broadband Maps are a significant improvement, numerous errors and inaccuracies persist.
- Congress should no longer rely on advertised speeds and availability to measure connectivity via the National Broadband Maps. Expanding the maps' focus to include quality of service and acceptance of speed test verification for fixed service should be a priority, especially as federal programs continue to rely on these maps to guide federal funding decisions.
- While mobile 5G service has tremendous value, Congress should not allow mobile 5G or 4G LTE service to be characterized as fixed wireless access in the National Broadband Maps.

Background

The Federal Communications Commission collects self-reported, location-level data from Internet Service Providers through a Broadband Data Collection (BDC) twice per year. This data reflects the advertised availability of broadband service or where it could be installed within 10 business days, as reported by ISPs in those areas.

The new National Broadband Maps, which now reflect location-by-location based data rather than the previously used census-block level data, are a significant improvement. However, numerous errors still persist in reported broadband availability. The FCC's reliance on advertised rather than actual speeds often does not accurately reflect reality, with some providers overstating service availability or capabilities in their BDC filings. In some instances, providers advertise service of "up to" 100/20 megabits per second while failing to consistently provide that level of service. Despite allowing for individual speed-test challenges to mobile service claims, the FCC has denied the use of speed tests to verify service claims for wireline and fixed wireless access, except in limited circumstances. By allowing wireline speed tests more broadly, the FCC can empower consumers to hold service providers accountable for the actual service delivered while also improving the accuracy of the National Broadband Map. Additionally, some providers offer mobile hotspots that use a 5G or 4G LTE signal, marketing it as in-home broadband service and reporting this mobile service as fixed wireless access in BDC filings.

In April 2025, the Government Accountability office (GAO) released a report¹ examining how federal agencies collaborate on broadband availability information, use the data that's reported in the National Broadband Map, and verify the accuracy of the information displayed. The report highlights insufficient processes at the FCC for verifying the quality or accuracy of mapping data, noting that "the accuracy of the broadband availability data on the map is uncertain," and detailing gaps in the verification and audit tools used by the FCC to ensure accuracy. The report highlighted that inaccurate data "could jeopardize agencies' ability to make the most efficient and effective funding decisions."

¹ <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-25-107207.pdf>

Proposed Solutions

Reliance on advertised speeds and availability as a way to measure connectivity will continue to leave rural consumers without reliable broadband access. While the focus on “access” to fixed broadband service made sense in the initial maps, expanding the focus to include “quality” of service should be a priority, especially as Congress and the FCC rely on the maps to guide federal funding decisions. Allowing for the broader submission of speed test data as part of a map challenge will help verify that providers are meeting their obligations and rural consumers are not inadvertently left behind. Congress must also urge the FCC to formalize and strengthen the processes for verifying the quality and accuracy of mapping data, as recommended by GAO.

Additionally, the characterization of mobile 5G or 4G LTE wireless service as fixed wireless service should not be allowed when mapping fixed broadband access in rural areas. Fixed wireless service provides a more reliable connection with more consistent speeds than mobile service. It also is less likely to employ data caps or impose additional fees for overages. Mobile access is not equivalent to fixed wireless service and improperly skews the BDC data in rural and hard-to-reach locations, making it more difficult to serve rural consumers with fixed broadband service.

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