

# FCC Should Focus On Broadband Experience

In its annual assessment of the state of advanced telecommunications capability, the FCC should forget about speed and focus on the capacity to provide an excellent broadband experience.

By Heather Burnett Gold / *Fiber Broadband Association*

Since 1996, the Federal Communications Commission has been required by Section 706 of the Telecommunications Act to release an annual report that assesses the state of advanced telecommunications capability in the United States and to adopt measures to further deployments. The FCC's approach has remained largely the same over the past two decades: It measures the market based on broadband speeds. After all, providers have always sold broadband based on speed.

Times, however, have changed. The Fiber Broadband Association recently proposed a different approach that could fundamentally change the way the FCC assesses broadband health in the United States. We recognize that consumers and broadband providers have moved beyond speed and that broadband experience is now the measure for success. Given that everyone understands that the best broadband experience comes from all-fiber networks, the path forward is clear: The FCC should focus on fiber.

Fiber gives U.S. consumers the broadband experiences they want – the whole package, not just impressive speeds. Sure, fiber provides the fastest symmetrical speed, but more important, it enables the most reliable, high-quality, low-latency service possible. It's also built to last. Unlike copper and coaxial cable, which require periodic replacements and repairs, fiber is future-proof. Consumers want the broadband experience fiber can provide, and they're willing to pay for it. People are willing to pay, on average, 8 percent more to rent and 2.8 percent more to buy an apartment equipped with fiber.

Consumers aren't the only ones with their eyes on fiber. Wireless providers also understand how important fiber is; that's why they use it to link their cell sites. As Kyle Malady, Verizon's senior vice president and chief network officer, recently said, "Fiber is basically the nervous system of the networks of the future." It's no wonder that providers across the country – from AT&T, Comcast and Cincinnati Bell to i3 Broadband, Chariton Valley Telephone and Shentel – are increasing their spending on fiber networks and touting fiber's capability to attract and retain customers.

Providers are also preparing for the fiber future. In a recent survey of 172 rural broadband providers, NTCA – The Rural Broadband Association found that 82 percent had developed long-term fiber deployment strategies, a notable increase from 74 percent in 2015. Sixty-six percent of respondents planned to be able to provide fiber networks to half or more of their customers by the end of 2019.

The market has evolved to the point that all-fiber connectivity is everyone's new broadband benchmark, and it is time the FCC got on board. In comments to the FCC, the Fiber Broadband Association urges the FCC to adopt an "all-fiber" metric – examining whether customers have access to all-fiber networks – to assess the United States' advanced telecommunications.

For the FCC to accurately assess access to broadband technology, speed cannot be the primary metric. The FCC should measure by the technology that can actually provide high-performance, future-proof broadband service: fiber. Robust fiber networks are essential to adequately meet community and enterprise needs, and they have what it takes to move the United States' digital potential to the next level. For that to happen, Americans must first have access to fiber.

The Fiber Broadband Association's comments to the FCC also urge the FCC to take steps to encourage and enable faster deployment of all-fiber networks. Tackling barriers to entry and excessive regulation will accelerate deployment to all consumers throughout the United States and fast-track a healthier, better, sufficient – read, all-fiber – state of broadband.

As the FCC considers the comments it received and prepares this year's Section 706 report, all of us at the Fiber Broadband Association will continue to advocate for the benefits of fiber – and fiber will continue to provide top-notch access to broadband. ❖

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