

# The Verdict Is In: FTTH Wins

Data released by the French regulatory agency ARCEP show that, in France, fiber to the home outperforms competing cable and DSL offers even when advertised speeds are comparable.

By Benoît Felten / *Diffraction Analysis*

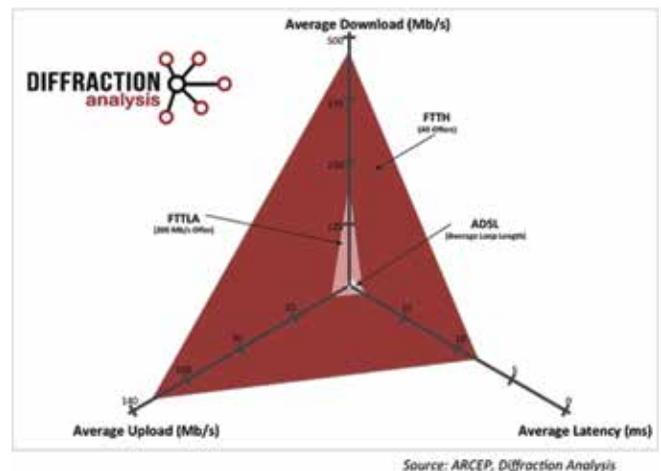
Recently, I published a piece titled Calling Fiber by Its Name. Based on a decision by French authorities, operators offering coaxial (FTTLA) or copper (VDSL) fiber-based products can still use the word “fiber” in their advertising but have to specify that the termination is not fiber. Cable operator Numéricable/SFR went ballistic when this was announced and threatened to appeal the decision, arguing that there was no difference in service between FTTLA and FTTH.

Well, we have an answer to that question, and it’s one that Numéricable/SFR isn’t going to like. In April, French regulator ARCEP published the results of its QoS panel testing and showed without a shadow of a doubt that FTTH performance is way ahead of even the best FTTLA offer on the market. The difference is most visible on upload capacity and latency, but even on download, there’s a stark difference.

I’ve put the results together in a simple-to-read exhibit based on the actual data reported by ARCEP. I averaged peak and off-peak performance (there isn’t much of a difference anyway) and focused on local performance (ARCEP also tests to foreign end points, but that says more about the peering and transit set-ups of the various market players than about the access technology).

A few important caveats: ARCEP distinguishes between cable offers at 30 Mbps, 100 Mbps and 200 Mbps download speeds but lumps together all FTTH offers, no matter what the speeds. For this comparison, I took the best available cable offer (200 Mbps). What this means is that the comparison is unfair to FTTH because the baseline for the incumbents’ FTTH offers is 100 Mbps.

Despite this, FTTH is more than twice as good on download as FTTLA (and 45 times as good as ADSL), 13 times as good as FTTLA on upload (and 130 times as good as ADSL) and twice as good on latency. (Note that the latency axis is inverted as lower latency is better.) So no matter how you slice it, FTTLA is not as good as FTTH, and pretending otherwise is just plain lying.



Comparison of performance variables for French providers of fiber to the home, fiber to the last amplifier (cable), and ADSL (copper) broadband

One might argue that most users don’t need the kind of performance FTTH demonstrates in France. It’s debatable and probably worth discussing. Some elements of the ARCEP panel suggest that for common uses of the internet (browsing, video streaming) end users may perceive little difference.

But no one would pretend that a Maserati and a Renault are functionally equivalent because no one needs to drive at 350 kilometers per hour. FTTLA and FTTH are different, and customers should be aware that what they are being sold is not the same thing. ❖

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