

BROADBAND COVERAGE

AVAILABILITY AND SPEED IN MONTANA

Montana by many measures is among the least internet-connected states - 49th, according to Broadband Now.

Wide spaces make wired or fiber connections difficult. Satellite download speeds often are less than desired. Lack of consumer concentration usually makes return on investment less attractive for providers than investments in densely populated areas. Recognizing that the free market will not necessarily benefit all of Montana equitably, the federal government has provided rural broadband funding. The state, too, has extended funding for broadband to schools, but much of that money went unspent in the 2019 biennium and was returned to its original coffers.

What might help Montana consumers gain improved access and internet speed? The following table poses issues and policy options that might help to address barriers, recognizing that telecommunications largely is federally regulated. However, if Montana does provide incentives, there may be a way of requiring information or targets in exchange for a benefit. Legislators are frequently reminded of the law of unintended consequences. The table is intended to provoke discussions on ways to meet policy goals, such as getting accountability in exchange for benefits.

As a reminder, providers currently can self-report broadband coverage under federal rules that have been widely criticized for allowing inaccurate assumptions as to speed and coverage availability, particularly in rural areas. For example, under current Federal

BROADBAND CONCERNS AND POLICY OPTIONS	
CONCERNS	POLICY SOLUTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where is broadband available in Montana? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define broadband in terms of minimum download, upload speed. Link incentives to transparency in terms of service area and speeds. Develop a statewide broadband expansion plan and advisory council.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Where have the federal dollars been used to expand broadband in Montana? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link reporting to incentives. This could include requiring reports of those wanting certification as eligible telecommunications carriers or use of right-of-way. The reports could be a short version of FCC-required reports.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At what speeds is broadband available for various technologies? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Define broadband in terms of quality, deliverables, speeds, or other criteria that meet basic standards regardless of technologies and that can evolve as technologies advance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> How can public policy balance affordability and encourage broadband adoption, especially among low-income communities, while ensuring a reasonable rate of return on investment? Further, if broadband is seen as a public good, to what degree is government involved? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set a state policy or state standards for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -- assistance to reach hard-to-serve areas -- incentives that require reporting of service areas and average speeds -- baseline permission to use right-of-way access along state highways

Broadband Spread, Speed

Communications Commission rules, which are in the process of being amended, a broadband provider can claim an entire census block as being "served" even if only one household in that census block actually has access at federally designated broadband speeds. FCC-designated speeds to qualify for certain types of federal funding range from 4 Megabits per second (Mbps) download and 1 Mbps upload (under old designations) to the current 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. Montana has no specification for speeds and has not so far attached any quid pro quo -- whether speed or reporting -- for financing incentives. The Federal Communications Commission requires eligible telecommunications carriers (ETCs) to file reports, but for other carriers there is no requirement for transparency that might help target any state or federal benefits for broadband providers.

The table below shows a range of technologies and speeds serving a selected group of Montana communities (based on zip codes). The projected speed availability is best-case scenario. Some may be the most expensive--not necessarily the most purchased. For some carriers, the more helpful number is the average download speed for an area, which Broadband Now estimates for each community and which is shown at the bottom of each column. In most cases, only BroadbandNow data is provided. High-Speed Internet (HSI) data provides a contrast for some areas, usually in access and speed.

Access and Speed Reported by Broadband Now and High-Speed Internet (HSI) - for Selected Montana areas, by listed providers and by type of technology, if available																	
	Bigfork 59911	Billings 59101/59102	Bozeman 59715	Butte 59701	Fort Benton 59447	Glasgow 59230	Glendive 59330	Great Falls 59401	Hamilton 59840	Havre 59601	Helena 59601	Kalispell 59901	Lewistown 59457	Miles City 59301	Missoula 59801	Red Lodge 59068	Wolf Point 59201
CenturyLink DSL Spread, Speed	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 95.4% 100Mbps HSI: 71% 40Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 98.8% 140Mbps HSI - 84%; 40 Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 97% 140Mbps HSI- 79%, 80Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 93.8% 100Mbps HSI -81% 20Mbps			<i>Broadband Now</i> 80.6% 20Mbps HSI - 83%, 20Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 99.7% 100Mbps HSI - 79%, 20Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 92.4% 100Mbps (16.39 Mbps average) HSI - 76%, 20Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 88.5% 20 Mbps HSI - 77% - 20Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 95.1% 100 Mbps HSI - 77%, 20 Mbps <i>Broadband Now</i> 2.3% 100Mbs	<i>Broadband Now</i> 98.1% 40Mbps HSI - 74% 40 Mbps 5.1% 100Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 87% 7Mbps HSI - 77% 20Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 86.5% 100Mbps HSI - 79%, 20Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 99.9% 140Mbps HSI - 81%, 80Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 82% 80Mbps HSI - 59%, 20Mbps	
<i>Fiber Spread Fiber Speed</i>	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 10.9% 1000Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 5.1% 1000Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 4.2% 1000Mbps												<i>Broadband Now</i> 2.5% 1000Mbps		
Spectrum Cable Spread Speed	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 72% 940Mbps HSI - 100% 100Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 99% 940Mbps HighSpeed Internet 100% 100Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 86.7% 940Mbps HSI - 100% 100Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 90.6% 940Mbps HSI - 100% 100Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 8.8% 940Mbps HSI - 100%, 100Mbps			<i>Broadband Now</i> 100% 940Mbps HSI -- 100%, 100Mbps	<i>BroadbandNow</i> 62.2% 940 Mbps HSI - 100% 100Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 86.4% 940Mbps HSI - 100% 100 Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 95.9% 940Mbps HSI - 100% 100Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 82.8% 940Mbps HSI- 100% 100Mbps			<i>Broadband Now</i> 100% 940Mbps HSI - 100%, 100Mbps	<i>Broadband Now</i> 74% 940Mbps HSI - 100%, 100 Mbps	
MT Internet Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed			5.5% 2Mbps 99.8% 7Mbps					<i>Broadband Now</i> 100% 7Mbps HSI - 100%, 6Mbps			<i>Broadband Now</i> 100%, 300Mbps HSI -100%, 6Mbps		<i>BroadbandNow</i> 100% 5Mbps HSI - 100%, 6Mbps				

Broadband Spread, Speed

				100% 7Mbps								<i>Broadband Now 100% 7 Mbps, 13.2% 100Mbps</i>		<i>BroadbandNow 100% 7Mbps</i>				
	Bigfork	Billings	Bozeman	Butte	Fort Benton	Glasgow	Glendive	Great Falls	Hamilton	Havre	Helena	Kalispell	Lewistown	Miles City	Missoula	Red Lodge	Wolf Point	
MT Internet DSL Spread, Speed Fiber Spread, Speed																		
HughesNet Satellite Spread, Speed	100% 25Mbps	100% 35Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps		100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	100% 25Mbps	
Viasat Satellite Spread, Speed	<i>BroadbandNow 100%, 25Mbps HSI -99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>BroadbandNow 100%, 25Mbps HSI -99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>BroadbandNow 100%,100Mbps High-Speed Internet 98%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>BroadbandNow 100% 100Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	100% 35Mbps	<i>Broadband Now 100% 35Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>Broadband Now 100% 35Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>BroadbandNow 100% 100 Mbps HSI - 99% 25Mbps</i>	100% 35Mbps	<i>Broadband Now 100% 100 Mbps HSI - 99% 25Mbps</i>	<i>Broadband Now 100%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>BroadbandNow 100%, 35Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>Broadband Now 100% 35Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>Broadband Now 100% 100Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>Broadband Now 100% 35Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	<i>BroadbandNow 100%; 35Mbps HSI - 99%, 25Mbps</i>	
Blackfoot DSL Spread, Speed Fiber Spread, Speed Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed	2.3% 40Mbps	7.4% 30Mbps 7.9% 8Mbps	7.4% 30Mbps								7.0% 7Mbps				16.7% 15Mbps			
MidRivers DSL Spread, Speed Cable Spread, Speed Fiber Spread, Speed							<i>Broadband Now 99.6% 8Mbps 87.2% 900Mbps 7.4% 1000Mbps HSI - 90%, 900Mbps</i>						<i>BroadbandNow 85.9%, 8Mbps BroadbandNow 68.2%, 900Mbps HSI - 95%, 900Mbps BroadbandNow 23.3% 1000Mbps</i>	<i>Broadband Now 91.5% 8Mbps, 89% 900Mbps HSI - 90%, 900Mbps Broadband Now 7.8% 1000Mbps</i>			89.8% 8Mbps	
Nemont DSL Spread DSL Speed Fiber Spread Fiber Speed Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed						<i>Broadband Now 98.4% 30Mbps, 3.8% 1000Mbps 99.6% 1.5Mbps HSI - ?%,25Mbps,</i>									<i>HSI- No % information, 768kb</i>		80.9% 30Mbps 67.3% 1000Mbps 95% 100Mbps	

Broadband Spread, Speed

	Bigfork	Billings	Bozeman	Butte	Fort Benton	Glasgow	Glendive	Great Falls	Hamilton	Havre	Helena	Kalispell	Lewistown	Miles City	Missoula	Red Lodge	Wolf Point
WispWest Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed		Broadband Now 100% 35Mbps	Broadband Now - 99% 35Mbps HSI - 98% 10Mbps													53.7% 35Mbps	
Montana OptiCon Fiber Spread, Speed DSL Spread, Speed			21.9% 225Mbps 20.9% 20Mbps														
MontanaSky Fiber Spread, Speed DSL Spread, Speed Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed (SkyConnect)	31.9% 100 Mbps 97.5% 10 Mbps 80.5% 20Mbps											Broadband Now 100% 10Mbps HSI - 74% 768 Kbps Broadband Now 83.8% 75Mbps					
Global Net Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed			Broadband Now and HSI - 98% 10Mbps	HSI - 98% 10Mbps				HSI-100% 10 Mbps			HSI - 99% 50Mbps						
Range Telephone Coop DSL Spread, Speed														Broadband Now 2% 1000Mbps HSI - 3% 3Mbps			
SpeedConnect Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed				HSI - 98% 10Mbps	8.3% 10Mbps			Broadband Now 5.5% 10Mbps HSI - 100% 10 Mbps	29.6% 10Mbps							HSI - 100% 10Mbps	
Three Rivers Communications Fiber Spread, Speed					Broadband Now 6.5% 50Mbps HSI -5%, 50 Mbps						HSI - 1%, 50 Mbps		3.2% 200Mbps				

Broadband Spread, Speed

	Bigfork	Billings	Bozeman	Butte	Fort Benton	Glasgow	Glendive	Great Falls	Hamilton	Havre	Helena	Kalispell	Lewistown	Miles City	Missoula	Red Lodge	Wolf Point
Triangle Communications Fiber Spread, Speed DSL Spread, Speed Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed										19.7% 200Mbps 3.3% 50Mbps 93.6% 10Mbps			HSI - Spread not available, 50 Mbps				
Other	HSI - Earthlink 71%, 40 Mbps	HSI - Earthlink 98%, 20 Mbps Tri-County Telephone Assn. Inc 100%, 6Mbps Northwest Com'cations Cooperative Spread ?, 768Kpbs	LittleApple Technologies Fixed Wireless Spread 15.8% Speed 32Mbps	Visionary Broadband Fixed Wireless Spread 8.9%, Speed 50Mbps	Landmark Wireless Fixed Wireless Spread 98.2% Speed 6Mbps HSI - 99%, 15Mbps			Broadband Now KDS Networks Fixed Wireless Spread 7% Speed 25Mbps HSI - Konceptio Data Services 100%, 10Mbps	Cybernet1 Fixed Wireless Spread 99.9% Speed 32Mbps BigSky Internet Fixed Wireless Spread 24.7% Speed 20Mbps			Bullitt Communications Fixed Wireless Spread, 86.9% Speed 30Mbps HSI - Earthlink 74%, 40Mbps		Cybernet1 Fixed Wireless Broadband Now 100% 32Mbps	Cybernet1 Fixed Wireless Broadband Now 100% 32Mbps HSI - 96%, 6Mbps	Broadband Now Visionary Broadband Fixed Wireless Spread 16.4%, Speed 50Mbps HSI - Tri-County Telephone Assn. Inc 11%, 768Kpbs	
Rocky Mountain Internet Fixed Wireless Spread, Speed									BroadbandNow 100% 3Mbps HSI - 100%, 10 Mbps					100% 3Mbps	HSI - 100% 10Mbps		
Bottom Line Per BroadbandNow	Average download speed 36.98 Mbps Access - 200 people have access to 1 or fewer providers	Average download speed 40.02Mbps Access - 7,000 people have access to 1 or fewer providers.	Average download speed - 47.35Mbps Access - 1,000 people have access to 1 or fewer wired providers.	Average download speed - 30.96Mbps Access - 5.3% 1000 people have access to 1 or fewer wired providers	Average download speed - 14.99Mbps Access - 1000 people (88.7%) have access to 1 or fewer wired providers	Average download speed - 10.98Mbps (96.5%) 4000 people have access to 1 or fewer wired providers; 96% can access fixed.	Average download speed - 41.5Mbps Access - 600 people (8.1%) have access to 1 or fewer providers.	Average download speed - 39.51Mbps Access - 1,000 people have access to 1 or fewer wired providers.	Average download speed - 22.81Mbps Access - 4,000 people (38%) have access to 1 or fewer providers.	Average download speed 37.11 Mbps Access - 1000 people (14.2%) have access to 1 or fewer providers 200 in Hill Co. have O access.	Average download speed - 36.52Mbps Access - 2,000 people have access to 1 or fewer providers.	Average download speed - 47.25% Access - Mbps 100% have some form of access-	Average download speed - 33.2Mbps Access - 300 people (4.4%) have access to 1 or fewer wired providers.	Average download speed - 48.47Mbps Access - 900 people (4.8%) have access to 1 or fewer wired providers.	Average download speed - 39.17Mbps Access - 5,000 people (6.6%) have access to 1 or fewer wired providers.	Average download speed - 24.67Mbps Access - 900 people (25.8%) have access to 1 or fewer wired providers. .	Average Download Speed - 13.62Mbps Access - 1,000 people have access to 1 or fewer wired providers

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*Based on information compiled by BroadbandNow. Information also compiled from High-Speed Internet: <https://www.highspeedinternet.com/>. If unmarked, the information is from BroadbandNow.
Average internet download speed in Montana, according to BroadbandNow, is 39.05Mbps.
https://broadbandnow.com/Montana/Wolf-Point?v=a&zip=59201&utm_expid=.PJ9POvv8RdC78MC6h_wbqQ.1&utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fbroadbandnow.com%2FMontana%2FGreat-Falls%3Fv%3Da%26zip%3D59401.