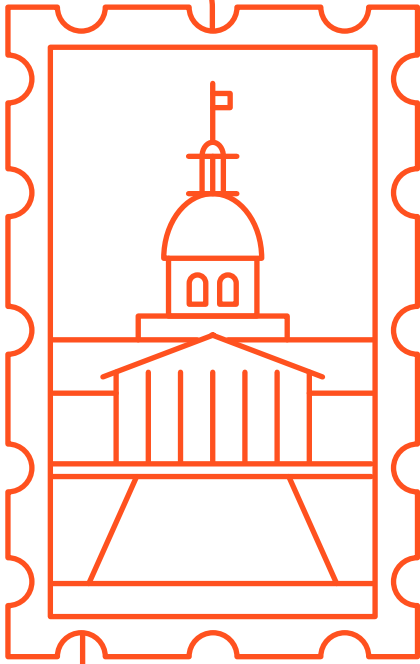


SOUTH CAROLINA

POPULATION: 5.28 MILLION
COUNTIES: 46



In Aiken County, thousands of rural residents have no connection whatsoever, and even more lack access to the Internet at broadband speeds. As a result, Aiken Electric Cooperative is working to expand infrastructure in rural areas.

South Carolina experiences stark disparities between rural and urban broadband access which led state and federal senators to speak out on mapping issues. Connectivity challenges in the state have garnered the attention of [House Majority Whip James Clyburn](#), who partnered with Ookla, an online speed test service, in 2019 and tasked the company with improving broadband maps in South Carolina within 18 months. The first set of maps was released in July 2019 and now Whip Clyburn says that “*South Carolina has the best broadband maps in the United States.*”

Whip Clyburn’s efforts are not the only examples of the movement to improve broadband mapping in South Carolina. In 2019, Palmetto Care Connections (PCC) partnered with the South Carolina Office of Rural Health and South Carolina Hospital Association. [PCC’s broadband map](#) uses GIS technology to produce maps that layered FCC data with Speedtest Intelligence data and U.S. Census data. One map shows areas that need broadband while the other shows areas that have the best broadband.

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic only exacerbated the need for reliable and complete broadband maps. In August 2020, [Governor Henry McMaster](#) and state [General Assembly](#) both wrote separate letters to South Carolina Internet service providers. Governor McMaster wrote:

Broadband connectivity is a powerful catalyst for economic and social advancement. It is no longer a luxury—it is a necessity, critical to ensuring a level playing

field for all South Carolinians. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inadequacies of some of our rural infrastructure. Children in South Carolina cannot learn remotely, workers cannot reliably work from home and telemedicine cannot be provided where broadband is not available.

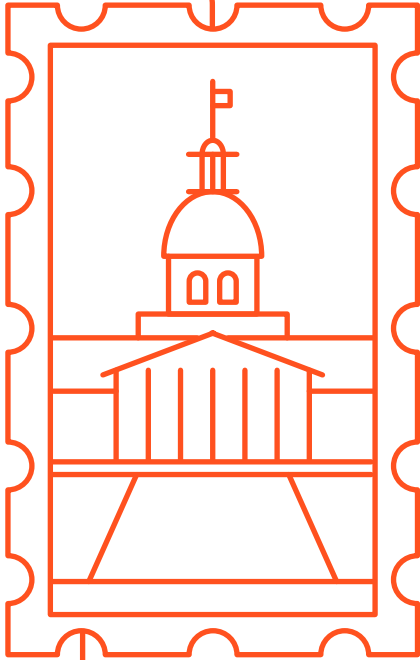
The Office of Regulatory Staff (ORS) for the State of South Carolina was charged with finding a vendor to contract with using the portion of the Coronavirus Relief Fund targeted at broadband mapping and planning. CostQuest Associates Inc. was engaged by the ORS to investigate broadband attributes and [produce a map](#) that allows residents to search for broadband providers at their address.

The FCC evaluated five million South Carolina residents and found that 4.7 million (91.3%) had fixed broadband access at minimum speeds. It concluded that 1.4 of 1.8 million people in rural areas (78.7%) have fixed broadband access. According to the agency’s evaluation of 3.3 million people, 97.7% of South Carolina’s urban residents had access to a fixed connection at minimum speeds. In contrast, BroadbandNow shows that in [South Carolina](#) there is 79.7% terrestrial broadband coverage and 52.4% access to a wired plan that costs at or less than \$60 a month. Microsoft’s data show that approximately [2.9 million people](#) do not use the Internet at broadband speeds.

One rural area that remains largely disconnected is Aiken County, where thousands of residents have no connection whatsoever, and even

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more lack access to the Internet at broadband speeds. At the start of COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, state Rep. Bill Taylor said “*We’re so far behind the curve, the Internet curve, in [Aiken County](#). Kids can’t do their schoolwork. Parents can’t communicate.*” [Palmetto Care Connections](#) found that the best connected parts of Aiken County are concentrated in the western half, while Windsor, Wagener, and Salley, as well as areas along Interstate 20 remain disconnected. As a result, Aiken Electric Cooperative is taking the lead to address the digital divide in the county and plans on using grant funding to expand infrastructure in rural areas, anticipating a summer 2021 service start date.

Additional Resources:

- [Palmetto Care Connections](#)
- [Where to locate high-speed Internet in South Carolina](#)
- [COVID bill includes \\$7B for broadband access; Clyburn aims for more](#)