



In November 2019, Microsoft estimated that over half of Tennessee residents do not use the Internet at broadband speeds. In 2021, Chattanooga residents have some of the fastest broadband in the U.S.

In December 2020, Tennessee was awarded almost [\\$149 million in Rural Digital Opportunity Funding](#) to expand the state's rural access to over 155,000 homes and businesses across the state. That is because nearly fifteen percent of rural Tennessee residents lack access to wireline broadband.

The FCC evaluated 6.8 million residents and found that 6.4 million (93.7%) had access to a fixed connection at minimum 25/3 Mbps speeds. In rural Tennessee, the FCC found that 1.9 of 2.3 million residents (84%) have fixed broadband access. Urban residents are more likely to have wireline broadband. The FCC evaluated 4.5 million of them and found that 4.4 million (98.6%) had access to a fixed broadband connection.

The disparity between rural and urban broadband infrastructure access prompted a response from the state government. On April 3, 2020, Governor Bill Lee and Department of Economic and Community Development Commissioner Bob Rolfe announced [\\$19.7 million in funding](#) to 17 grantees intended to serve over 31,000 residents across 21 counties. Governor Lee said:

One of my top priorities is ensuring the success of rural Tennessee. With the assistance of these grants, communities across 21 counties will now have access to broadband that will aid in that success. I applaud the efforts of these 17 broadband providers as they play a fundamental role in our efforts to boost rural communities throughout Tennessee.

On August 21, Governor Lee announced another [\\$62 million](#) to fund broadband for Coronavirus (COVID-19) impacted areas. Lt. Governor Randy McNally [said](#):

The emergence of COVID-19 greatly accelerated the need for widespread access to broadband. As all of us adjust to the new normal of social distance, technology becomes even more critical to study, work and socialize. These dollars will allow for implementation of greatly needed projects crucial to bringing us together virtually as we strive to stay apart physically.

The FCC's definition of broadband excludes mobile Internet, but publicizes availability data alongside wireline broadband. While mobile Internet is more widely available, particularly in rural areas, it does not serve as an actual substitute for wireline broadband access. Overall, the FCC found that 6.7 million people (99.7%) had access to a mobile connection at minimum advertised speeds of 5/1 Mbps. The FCC evaluated another 5.8 million people and found that 5.5 million people (95.7%) had access to a mobile network at median speeds of 10/3 Mbps.

Connectivity in rural Tennessee pulls those averages down, with the FCC finding that 2.2 people (99.2%) have access to a mobile connection at minimum advertised speeds of 5/1 Mbps. The FCC also evaluated 1.5 million people in rural Tennessee and found that 1.3 million people (90%) had access to a mobile network with median speeds of 10/3 Mbps. In urban

TENNESSEE

POPULATION: 6.94 MILLION
COUNTIES: 95

Tennessee, by contrast, the FCC reports that mobile Internet at speeds of 5/1 Mbps is nearly ubiquitous, while of 4.3 million people in urban Tennessee, 4.2 million people (97.7%) had access to a mobile network with median speeds of 10/3 Mbps.

Because the FCC's maps contain overstatements of broadband availability, many states are engaged in their own mapping efforts. [Tennessee previously partnered](#) with Connected Nation, but [the last available maps are CAF II Funding from 2015](#). While current information to supplement the FCC's data is not available from the state, Microsoft has its own estimations, with data from November 2019 showing that around [3.9 million people](#) in Tennessee do not use the Internet at broadband speeds, [over half of the state's population](#).

Additional Resource:

[Next Century Cities Case Study: Memphis, Tennessee](#)

