ATHENS COUNTY
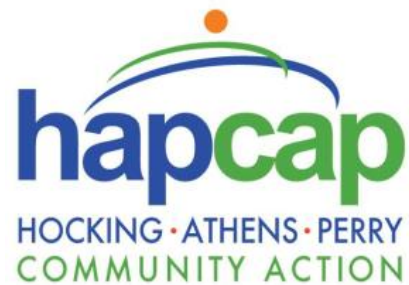# BROADBAND STRATEGIC PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HOCKING ATHENS PERRY COMMUNITY ACTION

April, 2022

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Athens County and the broader region have been plagued by a growing digital divide caused by a broadband network that has failed to deliver. For too many of our residents, broadband internet is simply not available. For many others, the services offered are unreliable and/or unaffordable. In the midst of the global pandemic that highlighted the issue of the growing digital divide, numerous conversations, at multiple levels of the community, had taken place to find ways to address these problems without providing a comprehensive path forward to achieving the goal of an accessible, affordable, reliable broadband network in Southeast Ohio.

In late 2020, the Athens County Foundation and the Osteopathic Heritage Foundation of Nelsonville collaboratively funded the creation of a full-time position to help take these conversations to the next stage and develop a more comprehensive approach to meeting this challenge. As the grantee, in February 2021, Hocking Athens Perry Community Action (HAPCAP) selected Paul Isherwood to serve as the Athens County Broadband Coordinator. Two of the most essential goals that the Foundations and HAPCAP laid out for this role were the establishment of a community-based advisory committee, the Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee, and the development and implementation of a comprehensive Athens County Coordinated Broadband Plan.

The Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee provides advice, support, and community input into the work of the Athens County Broadband Coordinator. In building the Advisory Committee, [see appendix A– ACBAC Committee Members] it was the intention to identify individuals that represent multiple sectors of the community: including, but not limited to local government, the business community, the non-profit sector, schools, healthcare, libraries, and a diverse cross-section of the community. The committee has aided the work of the Broadband Coordinator and the development of this Coordinated Broadband Plan. Going forward, the committee will help the Coordinator to identify and prioritize broadband projects in the county that fit the parameters of this plan.

It is the intent of the Athens County Broadband Coordinator and the Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee to address issues of broadband access and connectivity challenges in the County and the broader region to help deliver a reimagined Athens. The use of the internet grows more and more closely connected with each and every aspect of American society, ranging from economic opportunities, to education, to current events, and more. In spite of this, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) still estimates that 21 million Americans do not have access to broadband services. This number is alarming. However, many other organizations, including Buckeye Hills Regional Council, speculate that the number is significantly higher.[1] The goal of this project is for an Athens County that is no longer plagued by this divide and as a result, allows every member of our community to avail of the opportunities afforded by a broadband connection. This is our reimagined Athens.
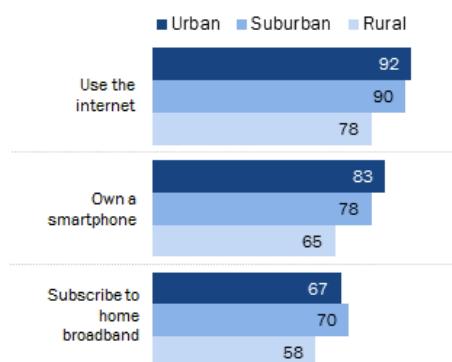
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[1] "How States Are Expanding Broadband Access: New Research Identifies Tactics for Connecting Unserved Communities." *Pew Research Center*, February 27 2020, www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/reports/2020/02/how-states-are-expanding-broadband-access.

BROADBAND IN ATHENS

The FCC defines broadband as a high-speed internet connection, having download speeds of at least 25 megabits per second (Mbps) and upload speeds of at least 3 Mbps. In the year 2022, these speeds are broadly considered as outdated. In March of 2021, a bipartisan group of Senators called on federal agencies to update broadband program requirements to reflect current and anticipated uses—specifically, they called for symmetrical speeds of 100 Mbps.[2] Many households and businesses in rural regions lack affordable, high-speed connection opportunities; therefore, through a combination of working with private service providers and utilizing state funding, it is essential to expand both digital access and inclusion through the implementation of this Broadband Strategic Plan.

Rural adults are less likely than those in other areas to have high-speed internet at home, own a smartphone

% of U.S. adults, by community type, who say they ...

■ Urban ■ Suburban ■ Rural

Use the internet
- 92
- 90
- 78

Own a smartphone
- 83
- 78
- 65

Subscribe to home broadband
- 67
- 70
- 58

Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted Jan. 3-10, 2018.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In terms of infrastructure, rural areas often lack the physical systems necessary for providing broadband services, especially to personal residences. According to the Federal Communications Commission, rural communities are significantly less likely to have adequate wiring for broadband access; additionally and congruently, these regions tend to have slower internet connection speeds and lack the expanse of internet service provider options available in urban or suburban areas.[3] Due to the increased challenges associated with extending infrastructure to include rural homes and businesses, many internet providers have pursued economic opportunities in more densely-populated suburban and urban communities, thus leaving these extra connections to the state.[4]

These findings also support evidence that residents of urban areas experience fewer obstacles to reliable internet access. Only 13% of adults living in urban areas and 9% of those living in suburban areas view access to high-speed internet as a major problem in their communities.[5] The contrast between urban/suburban communities and rural ones only exacerbates the inequalities

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[2] K. Bell, "Senators Ask the FCC to change the definition of high-speed-broadband," https://www.engadget.com/senators-fcc-change-definition-high-speed-broadband-222150947.html; For text of letter go to: https://www.bennet.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/c/7/c76028fb-488d-498e-8506-7d8a2dce3172/05DDC9148CC7F12A9F09235F77BB7A0D.bipartisan-broadband-speed-letter.pdf

[3] Monica Anderson. ""About a Quarter of Rural Americans Say Access to High-Speed Internet is a Major Problem." Pew Research Center. February 27 2020, www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/10/about-a-quarter-of-rural-americans-say-access-to-high-speed-internet-is-a-major-problem/

[4] "How States Are Expanding Broadband Access . . ."

[5] Anderson.

perpetuated by insufficient broadband services in rural regions, forming a digital divide that will only deepen if the issue remains unaddressed.

Most relevantly, during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, many residents of Southeastern Ohio faced significant challenges with remote work and remote learning that placed them at a real disadvantage compared to other areas of the country with reliable broadband connection. As stated previously, access to broadband services affects a wide range of societal factors, including economic opportunities, educational opportunities, social opportunities, and more. The ability to obtain and afford high-speed internet presents an issue of equality and human rights; crucially, this project supports the position that access to efficient broadband in rural regions should *not* be limited to those who can afford to pay burdensome rates. In light of these challenges specific to its clients and community as a whole, HAPCAP has committed to the development of a concrete plan that will address issues with infrastructure, internet connection, and digital inclusion in both public and private spheres.

## DEMOGRAPHICS: GEOGRAPHY & POPULATION
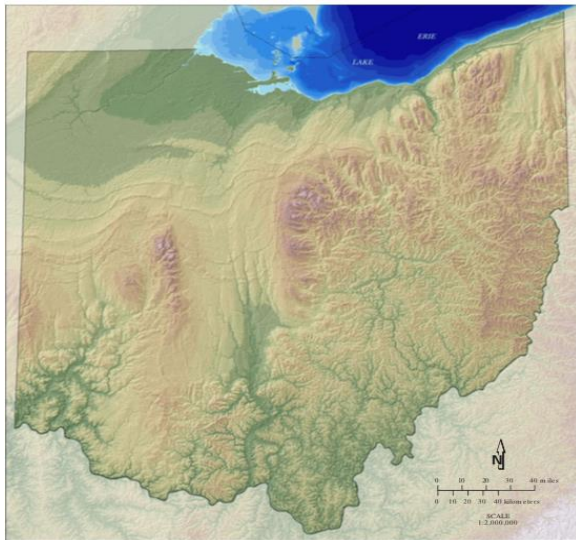
Map created by the State of Ohio

Department of Natural Resources

HAPCAP primarily serves a three-county area in Southeastern Ohio: Athens County, Hocking County, and Perry County. This strategic plan focuses specifically on Athens County, which includes a total land area of 503.6 square miles.[6] However, in creating the position of the Athens County Broadband Coordinator, the leadership of both HAPCAP and the Athens County Foundation recognized the need for a regional approach to the broadband challenges facing the county and this has influenced how the coordinator has operated in the role. The geography of the region is an important consideration. As illustrated in the map to the left, the terrain in the region is marked by dramatic hills and valleys (a notable difference from the Northwestern region of the state especially), which poses potential challenges for the construction of the necessary infrastructure for broadband expansion projects.

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[6] "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, United States Government, 2019, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/athenscountyohio/PST045219.

Athens County is home to approximately 65,000 people.[7] 14.9% of the population is under the age of eighteen and 12.1% of the population is sixty-five or older, placing 72% of the population somewhere in between.[8] In terms of racial makeup, the population is 91.2% White, 3.1% Asian, 2.8% Black, 1.9% Hispanic or Latino, 0.4% American Indian or Alaskan Native, and 0.1% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.[9] 2.4% of the population identifies with two or more races.[10]
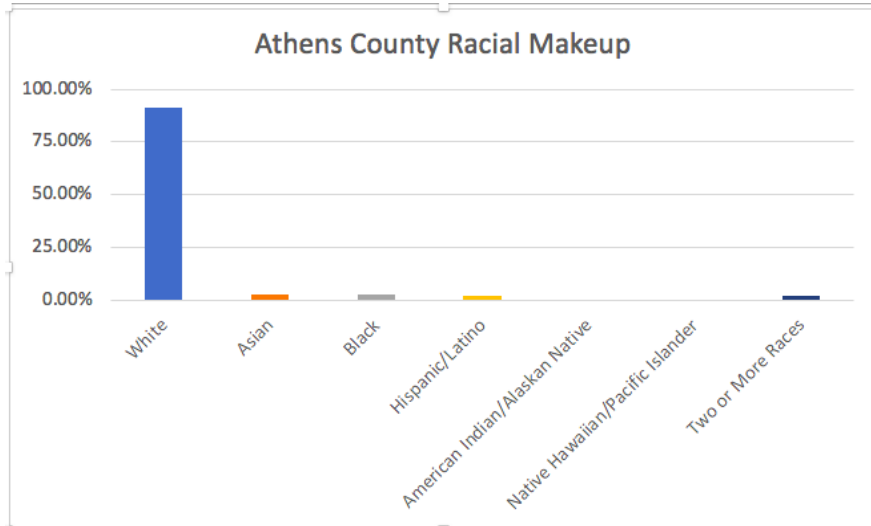
Enrollment in Ohio University, the county's largest employer and an important anchor institution, has been in decline for the past several years. In the fall of 2021, the total number of students attending the university's Athens campus was 17,141, a decline of 17.3% from 2014. In spite of this decline, Ohio University students continue to make up an important demographic consideration in assessing the broadband needs and deficits facing the county.

Athens County, like much of the broader Southeast Ohio region, has suffered with endemic poverty for successive generations. According to the US Census Bureau, 26.6% of Athens County residents live below the poverty line, making the county one of the poorest areas of the state. This is further reflected when comparing the county's median household income of $40,905 to the national rate of $60,843. The most prevalent occupations are educational services (24.1%), manufacturing (15.3%), and retail (11.4%). The vast majority of the workforce work in the private sector (83%). The two cities in Athens County are Athens and Nelsonville, which each house populations of around 24,500 and 5,100 residents respectively.[11] Additionally, there are eight identified villages: Albany, Amesville, Buchtel,

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[7] "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, United States Government, 2019, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/athenscountyohio/PST045219.

[8] https://development.ohio.gov/files/research/C1006.pdf

[9] "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, United States Government, 2019, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/athenscountyohio/PST045219.

[10] "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, United States Government, 2019, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/athenscountyohio/PST045219.

[11] Jessie Schmitzer, "Athens County Coordinated Transportation Plan." (2018): 9.

Chauncey, Coolville, Glouster, Jacksonville, and Trimble.[12] Lastly, there are also thirty unincorporated communities, as illustrated by the chart below. Outside of these areas, the county's population is sparsely populated. According to the 2010 census, the population density for the county stands 128.6 people per square mile. The most recent census data is expected to show a similar lack of population density, highlighting one of the most important challenges to expanding the broadband network in the county. In spite of these challenges, according to the US Census Bureau data, 88% of households in Athens County have a computer and 75.6% have an internet subscription.[13]

CITIES	VILLAGES
Athens Nelsonville	Albany Amesville Buchtel Chauncey Coolville Glouster Jacksonville Trimble

UNINCORPPORATED	CENSUS-DESIGNATED PLACES
Beaumont Frost Kilvert Pleasanton Beebe Garden Lottridge Pratts Fork Bessemer Glen Ebon Luhrig Redtown Big Run Guyesville Mineral Shade Burr Oak Hamley Run Modoc Sharpsburg Canaanville Hartleyville New England Torch Carbondale Hebardville New Utley Doanville Imperial Floodwood	Hockingport Millfiled New Marshfield Stewart The Plains

Cities and other locations in Athens County

The map below shows the vast network of roads in Athens County and beyond with no mobile broadband services. This problem is directly related to the lack of broadband service in the area, as mobile networks require cell towers connected to fiber optic networks. While a significant fiber "backbone" network exists in the county, it has not been deployed or utilized in a way to optimize cell phone service.

According to the research conducted by the Buckeye Hills Regional Council, between 80% and 90% of households in rural Southeastern Ohio have no broadband services available to them; additionally, 75% of the rural areas studied do not have access to broadband at the
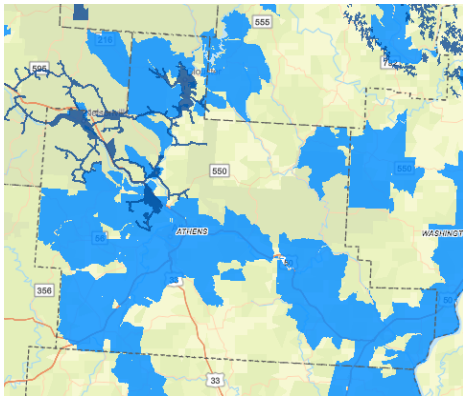
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[12] Schmitzer, 9.
[13] "QuickFacts," United States Census Bureau, United States Government, 2019, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/athenscountyohio/PST045219.

current FCC minimum of 25/3 – 25 mbps download speed and 3 mbps upload speed.[14] This study indicates that lack of access to broadband results from extremely degraded copper cables, an out-of-date infrastructure whose capabilities mimic the technological advances of the 1930s.[15] Especially with the lower population density in these regions, the unreliable and insufficient infrastructure makes broadband services even more complicated for residents of rural areas.
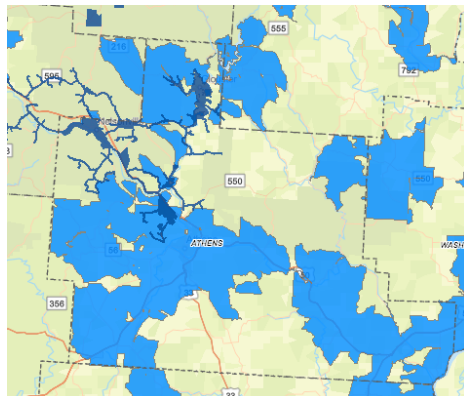
While the whole state of Ohio faces broadband challenges, counties in the Southeastern part of the state face particular disadvantages. One major challenge faced by the whole state is the lack of accurate information about the status of broadband connections. The maps on the following page from the state's broadband strategy illustrate an alarming picture in Athens County about the extent of broadband access.[16] The data used to make these maps, however, is broadly considered as completely inadequate. Based in no small part on studies commissioned by the Buckeye Hills Regional Council and carried out by Reid Consulting Group, the real picture of the broadband network in the region has come to light.

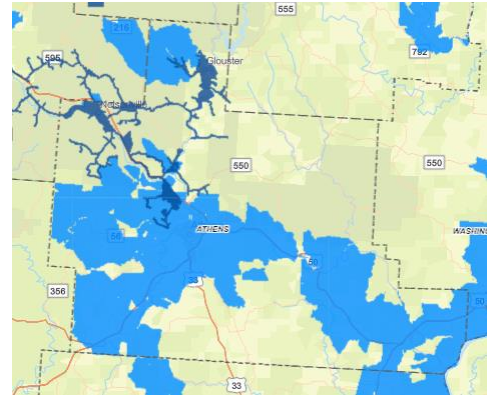| Athens County Data Maps from State's Broadband Strategy |
|---|

25 Mbps Download/3 Upload   50 Mbps Download/5 Upload   100 Mbps Download/10 Upload

Buckeye Hills and Reid Consulting argues that these broadband maps, based on FCC data, severely underestimate rural households without access to sufficient broadband services.[17] In partnership with various other local development districts and again with the expertise of Reid Consulting, Buckeye Hills helped create Connecting Appalachia to study the broadband network in the region and advocate for change. In 2021, Connecting Appalachia produced county profiles for the Appalachian region that highlight the true nature of the problem.

[14] "Broadband Research." *Buckeye Hills Regional Council.* 2017. buckeyehills.org/broadband-research.
[15] "Broadband Research." *Buckeye Hills Regional Council.* 2017. buckeyehills.org/broadband-research.
[16] "Ohio Broadband Strategy." *Innovate Ohio.*
innovateohio.gov/wps/portal/gov/innovate/priorities/resources/broadband/.
[17] "Broadband Research." *Buckeye Hills Regional Council.* 2017. buckeyehills.org/broadband-research.

According to their research, of the 28,469 households in Athens County, 10,255 are unserved.[18] Having this more alarming but accurate picture is crucial to ensure that any solutions to the problem are designed to address the true nature of the challenge.

In 2021, in response to a wave of criticism from across the country, the FCC begun a process of gathering more accurate data with the aim of producing new maps. Based on the data gathering techniques being adopted by the FCC in this process, it is expected that, when produced in late 2022, these new maps will tell a similar story to those available from Connecting Appalachia. On the next page you will see Connecting Appalachia's map of broadband access in Athens County.
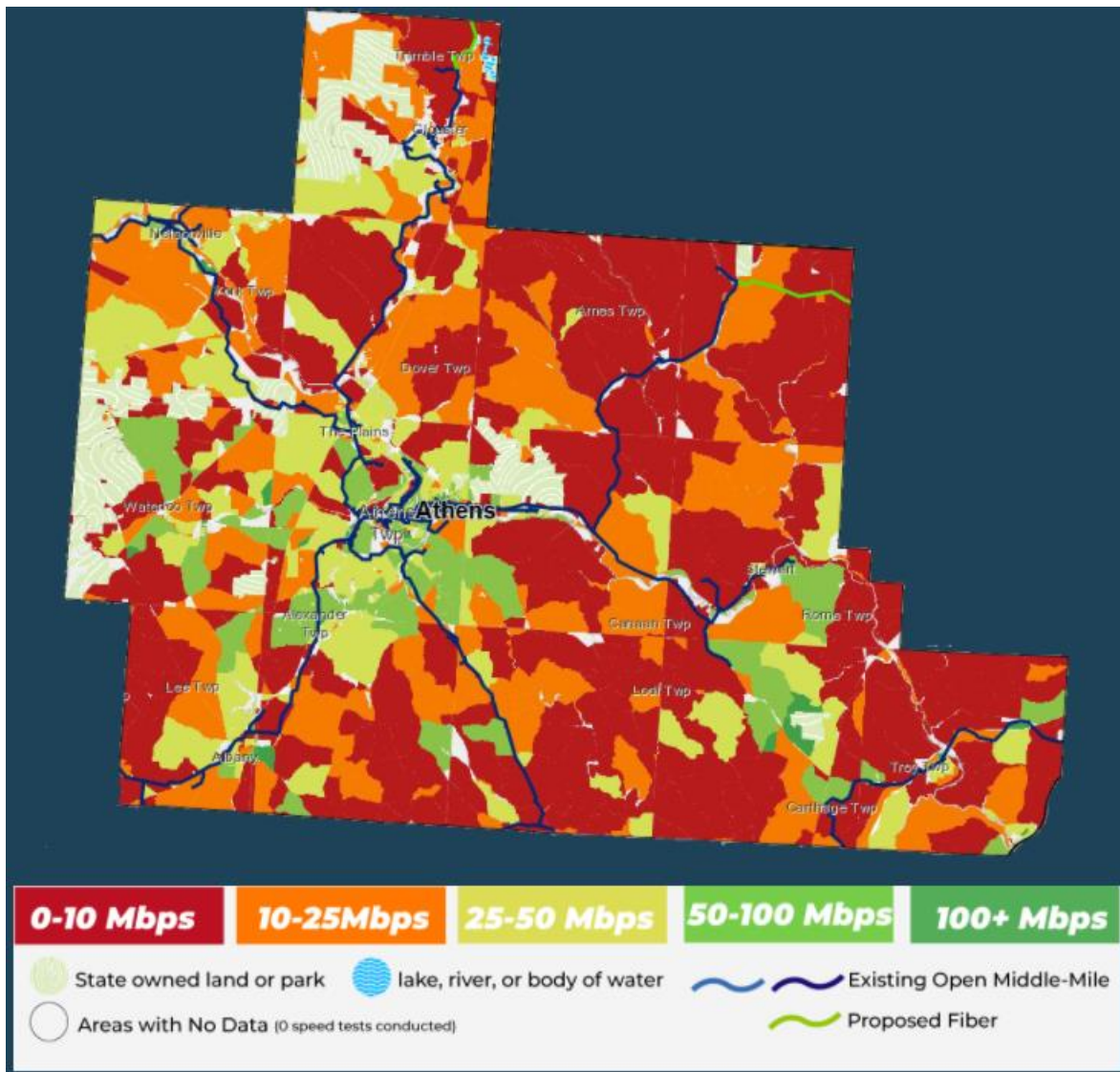
Connecting Appalachia Athens County Profile Map

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[18] https://connectingappalachia.org/countyprofile/2148-2/

In the following sections, this plan attempts to address these flaws and gaps in broadband analyses based on data from surveys and other studies, culminating in a set of concrete steps to address these challenges.

ATHENS COUNTY BROADBAND SURVEY

From June through to the end of October of 2021, the Broadband Coordinator sent out an online survey to the community to gain insights and receive public feedback on the nature of the digital divide in the county. Due to the complications posed by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, engaging with the public in more direct ways (such as public meetings, focus groups, etc.) proved very difficult to coordinate. The survey, however, provided a valuable source of data, receiving 188 responses in total. In recognition of the priority to provide residential broadband connections, the survey was targeted to the residential population rather than businesses. 154 or 88% of the respondents indicated that they had an internet connection at their place of residence. As an online survey, this ratio was not unexpected, but does not reflect the level to which Athens residents have access to the internet in their homes. As previously noted, census data indicates that the percentage of residents with a broadband subscription is about 75%. Of the 21 respondents who indicated that they had no home internet connection, a variety of reasons were given. The two most common responses, however, provided by over half of the respondents, were that 1) the cost of an internet connection is too expensive; and 2) no provider offered service to their address.

Unsurprisingly, considering the size of their footprints in the county's internet and telecoms market, the two largest providers, according to survey respondents, are Frontier (27.3%) and Spectrum (24%). The third largest provider according to the survey is local company, Nelsonville TV Cable, with approximately 12% of the market share. More than 3 out 4 respondents do not have a cable television connection. This suggests that "cable-cutting" initiatives, whereby households can replace cable television with online streaming entertainment alternatives, may have a limited impact on the community.

In response to a question regarding the speed and reliability of the service, the survey results provided a mixed picture. Almost half of respondents (48.1%) said that the speed at which webpages load were "good" and a further 12.3% said they were "excellent." This suggests that overall, the majority of users in Athens County were satisfied with the speed of their connection. A significant share of respondents, 39.6% did say, however, that their speeds were "poor." In response to the question about the reliability of their connection, the results provided a similar picture. Over half of respondents indicated that the reliability of their connection is "Good" (44.8%) or "Excellent" (11%). Again, a significant group at 44.2% indicated the reliability of their connection as "poor." This aligns with other analysis in this report that the existing network requires attention. Respondents indicated in comments that problems they encountered were slow connections and regular outages.

In terms of the monthly cost of an internet connection, that most common response of respondents (48%) was in the $50-$75 a month. 31.6% had a more expensive connection

in the range of $76-$100 a month, and an even smaller share paid above $100. Only three respondents paid more than $151 a month. Considering the income profile of the county and the availability of the FCC Emergency Broadband benefit, it was disappointing to see that only ten respondents to our survey had participated in the FCC's subsidy program. Furthermore, 90% of our respondents were paying more than $50 a month for their service. The most common response from respondents as to why they were not taking advantage of the Emergency Broadband Benefit was that they either did not know about the program (68.3%) or that their household was not eligible (27.6%).

The most popular uses for respondents' use of home internet were "work," "entertainment," and "communication." 77 respondents indicated that somebody in the household used the home connection for work, highlighting the already integral role that home internet connections are playing in the economics of Athens families.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In consideration of the information gathered in this strategy and of the potential future developments, the recommendations below are intended to further the development of broadband connectivity, access, and utilization in Athens County in a strategically thoughtful way. A re-imagined Athens is possible where these broadband developments allow for greater economic development, social interactions, healthcare outcomes, and cultural access for the communities of Athens County. Moreover, without these broadband developments, the risks to the county are severe, including being left further behind economically and a growing brain drain as residents seek out other parts of the country with better broadband options. There is little doubt that as a result of this unique moment where broadband development has received significant bipartisan support that major changes in the broadband landscape will occur. As a result, the digital divide that plagues America today will become much simpler as one of communities with and without broadband access. Those left behind face a stark future.

Based on these conclusions, HAPCAP has proposed the below set of goals and strategies to achieve them. The overall strategy is based on the realization of a Reimagined Athens where with the aid of an effective and reliable broadband network our communities are able to use the strengths of our region to compete alongside the rest of the world. These goals are designed to shape the future work of the Athens County Broadband Coordinator and to inform the guidance of the Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee. They are crucial to ensure that the county can secure the best possible broadband outcome that meets the community's needs. Moreover, the addition of affordability and digital inclusion to the infrastructure equation is crucial to ensure that the investment in Athens County broadband can provide the economic, social, and cultural potential offered by better broadband connections.

GOAL: INFRASTRUCTURE - All county residents should have viable broadband connection options.

➢ **Strategy: Guarantee all activity by ISPs related to the State's Residential Broadband Expansion Grant program, RDOF, ARC or any other funding sources is undertaken and completed.** The Athens County Broadband Coordinator will make it a priority in 2022 and 2023 to monitor the State's Residential Broadband Expansion Grant program and any other grants awarded to ISPs to construct broadband infrastructure in the county. The state grant program includes a two-year build requirement and ensuring that the selected ISPs complete their projects on schedule and as proposed will be crucial. There may not be another opportunity like this to develop the broadband infrastructure and all other potential grants, both state and federal, will depend largely on the outcome of this grant program.

➢ **Strategy: Bring broadband connections to areas not covered by the state's grant program.** In the aftermath of the state's grant program, the Athens County Broadband Coordinator will identify any unserved or underserved areas of the county that have not been claimed by an ISP from this process. Once these areas are identified, the coordinator will strategize with local leaders – mayors, trustees,

commissioners – a way to entice an ISP to provide service and/or promote alternatives like Starlink. This will likely include the use of local ARPA funds and identifying appropriate federal grants.

➢ **Strategy: Continued advocacy with future broadband funding opportunities.** The Athens County Broadband Coordinator and the Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee will continue monitoring and assessing the value of pursuing all potential government broadband funding opportunities.

➢ **Strategy: Continue providing advice and guidance to local officials on broadband issues.** The Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee will provide guidance to mayors, commissioners, township trustees, and other officials charged with making these decisions about ARPA-funded broadband projects.

GOAL: AFFORDABILITY – Economic barriers should no longer prohibit community members from accessing the broadband network.

➢ **Strategy: Increase awareness of, and applications to the Emergency Broadband Benefit / Affordable Connectivity Program.** The Athens County Broadband Coordinator will work to increase awareness in the county of the Emergency Broadband Benefit program and its news guise as the Affordable Connectivity Program. With the coordinator's help HAPCAP can provide help to local residents eligible for the program. This program, will likely become a permanent fixture in the tools of social service organizations efforts to bring services to low-income households.

➢ **Strategy: Identify other sources of funding outside of the Affordable Connectivity Program to help low-income and other residents of the county have access to a broadband connection.** The coordinator will help identify other potential funding sources to offset the cost of broadband connections. One example of this is the Home Relief Funds made available due to the pandemic that can be used to pay internet subscription fees.[19]

➢ **Strategy: Continue the development of positive working relationships with ISPs operating in the county.** The coordinator will continue working with ISPs to promote their low-income packages to eligible residents.

➢ **Strategy: Increase access to affordable devices.** The Broadband Coordinator will continue to develop relationships with organizations like PCs for People and seek out other opportunities to provide access to community members to affordable devices.

GOAL: DIGITAL INCLUSION/LITERACY – All county residents can successfully and effectively utilize the broadband network for work, leisure, health, and social services.

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[19] https://hapcap.org/relief

➢ **Strategy: Assess the digital inclusion resources already available in the community.** A key goal of the Athens County Broadband Coordinator and the Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee in the coming year will be to make a deeper assessment of the digital inclusion opportunities available in the county.

➢ **Strategy: Develop specific strategy for the county to become a Digital Ready Community.** Over the course of the next six months, with the input of local stakeholders across a variety of sectors, the Coordinator should develop a strategy to develop Athens County into a digital ready community.

➢ **Strategy: Provide educational support to community members on basic broadband connection skills.** The Broadband Coordinator can be a useful resource for local communities to help remedy simple-to-fix problems often faced by internet users. These include router resetting, modem setup, and identifying user error problems. This help can be provided through either an online or an in-person community meeting format.

➢ **Strategy: Development of a one-stop online presence for broadband issues for the community.** Develop a website that provides information and advice to community members on all-things related to broadband. This can include information on ISPs operating in the area, advice on selecting a service and on equipment.

➢ **Strategy: Support workforce development efforts in the county and region.** A key aspect of digital inclusion that allows for broadband deployment to have a real economic development impact on a community is the up-skilling or enhancement of the skills of the local community to be a more digitally literate and skilled workforce. The work being done by the coordinator is crucial to ensure that workforce development efforts and digital training are connected and highlighted.

➢ **Strategy: Support community-led remote work development.** As numerous entities across the county are working toward the development and promotion of the area as a remote work hub, the coordinator can help bring these efforts together in a coordinated manner. Moreover, for these efforts to succeed it will be essential for the infrastructure work that will improve the broadband network to move ahead. The coordinator can provide timely updates on this work to the community which will help with the promotion and developments of the various remote work initiatives.

GOAL: ADVOCACY – Ensure the awareness of the broadband issues facing Athens County continue to get the attention of local, state, and federal leaders. Furthermore, ensure that the local community has a high level of awareness regarding the broadband initiatives that are ongoing.

➢ **Strategy: Provide continued advocacy on the broadband challenges facing Athens.** The current focus on rural America's broadband challenges will not continue without continued advocacy on the parts of local leaders and officials. Having a countywide broadband coordinator places Athens at the center of that conversation and allows

HAPCAP to play a leading role in advocacy efforts. Already the Broadband Coordinator has engaged in advocacy efforts in a number of areas and it is important for that work to continue.

➢ **Strategy: Promote a "Re-imagined Athens."** The importance of delivering broadband connections to the residents and businesses of Athens should not be understated. Without this development, Athens faces a bleak economic future. With a broadband connected community and digital ready community, however, the prospect of not merely catching up is on the table. Indeed, a Re-Imagined Athens where we are able to use the strengths of our region to compete alongside the rest of the world is a feasible outcome. To this end, the coordinator will spend time reminding local, state, and federal leaders and community members and groups of the potential that broadband connections can provide.

➢ **Strategy: Develop an Athens County Broadband Navigator Website.** As there is so much activity and interest in the broadband space, there is a need for website portal providing access to broadband information to the community. The website would cover a variety of areas, including information about available ISPs in the county and guidance on choosing a plan. Furthermore, this broadband portal should act as a one-stop location for other broadband issues including access to digital literacy opportunities and subsidy opportunities. As a result, HAPCAP can continue its role of providing the community with access to resources. It should be the responsibility of the coordinator to maintain and update the website.

ATHENS COUNTY BROADBAND GOALS

	Infrastructure	Affordability	Digital Literacy
Short Term	- Identify current network properties - Identify all current projects working to improve the network - Decide on broadband priorities - Identify appropriate funding opportunities	- FCC Emergency Broadband Relief - Further legislative relief - Investigate what is an affordable rate for internet	- Identify digital literacy opportunities in the county - Identify digital literacy goals
Interim Short to Medium	- Identify gaps in network - Engage community on broadband projects - Engage ISPs on future construction plans - Explore potential alternatives where fiber to home may not be feasible	- Survey community on affordability - Engage ISPs on paths to affordability - Investigate device accessibility - PCs for People - Investigate various broadband models that allow for lower subscription costs	- Identify gaps in digital literacy programs - Geographic - Programs by target demographic – jobseekers / youth / elderly - Identify agencies willing to provide programming - Identify sources of funding for programming - Examine device availability and servicing
Medium Term	- Prepare strategy to fill network gaps - Design county/regional broadband network - Begin implementation of localized projects	- Promote community awareness of various subsidy programs – Federal Communications C, Lifeline - Create online platform for community to determine eligibility for programs	- Expand current digital literacy opportunities - Create central online guide to local digital literacy programs
Interim Medium to Long	- Maintain relationships with major ISPs regarding fiber deployment - Committee issues regular updates to local and state officials on progress of network development	Various local broadband models being implemented that allow for reduced costs	Continuous local monitoring of community needs around digital literacy
Long Term	- Fast last mile fiber Broadband constructed - Communities outside of fiber network served by high speed fixed wireless - Starlink available where needed	- Easy access and engagement with affordable, reliable, and fast broadband throughout the community - Continued Federal/State funding for subsidy programs - Increased economic activity solving affordability concerns	- Variety of opportunities for targeted Digital Literacy - Promoting the area as a digitally literate and prepared community and workforce
Goal	**All county residents have viable broadband connection options.**	**Economic barriers no longer prohibiting community members from accessing the broadband network.**	**All county residents can successfully and effectively utilize the broadband network for work, leisure, health, and social services.**

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Appendix A

Athens County Broadband Advisory Committee Members

Paul Isherwood - Athens County Broadband Coordinator

Kerry Pigman - Athens County Foundation

Kelly Hatas - Hocking Athens Perry Community Action

Jessica Stroh - Hocking Athens Perry Community Action

Mollie Fitzgerald - Athens County Economic Development Council

Nick Tepe - Athens County Libraries

Chris Chmiel - County Commissioner

Steve Patterson - Athens City

Sam Miller - Buckeye Hills Regional Council representative

Amy Renner - Mayor of Chauncey

Gary Goosman - Mayor of Amesville

April Stewart – Athens City School District

Laurie McKnight - Workforce Development Board for Area 14

Megan Riddlebarger – Corporation for Ohio Appalachian Development

Ben Lachman - Remote Work and Tech Entrepreneur

Eli Flournoy – The Sugarbush Foundation

Carly Fitz – Buckeye Hills Regional Council, Broadband Fellow

Ryan Collins – Buckeye Hills Regional Council

Nathaniel Berger – LIGHTS Regional Innovation Network

Jason Jolley – George Voinovich School of Leadership and Public Service

Chelsea Young – Ohio Health