

Have an Opinion about Your Internet Connection?

Written by Kathleen Vinehout, State Senator 31st District
Monday, 08 August 2016 16:44 - Last Updated Monday, 08 August 2016 19:28

<http://newiprgressive.com/images/stories/S5/internet-rural-s5.jpg>



This survey on Internet access now being conducted by the Public Service Commission will paint a more accurate picture of broadband coverage in Wisconsin. Participate and your responses will help inform lawmakers on how to bring our state into the twenty-first century.

ALMA, WI - Do you have a great Internet connection? Less than what you'd prefer? Makes it impossible for you to do your work or your children's homework? No service at all?

Make your opinion known!

The state is taking a survey of how Wisconsinites connect to the Internet. The survey is free – and ironically – available online. Those without Internet – or such a slow connection they cannot fill out a survey – can let their voice be heard by calling the following toll-free phone number – (877) 360-2973.

Home connections and businesses are measured in separate surveys. You can reach the residential survey here: https://www.research.net/r/WI_PSC_broadband_survey

Businesses can voice their opinion here: https://www.research.net/r/WI_PSC_business_broadband_survey

To prepare for the survey, make sure you know your Internet provider and the number of electronic devices in your home or business that connect to the Internet. The survey will ask for your address, the type of problems you experience, and if you have students in the home who also have Internet problems.

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The Public Service Commission – the state agency responsible for supervising public utilities – is conducting the survey. The state must improve information on who is well served and who is not. The current map of where broadband exists is based on information from the companies who provide the service – not from customers.

As a consequence, the state broadband map is inaccurate. Service in an area that appears covered on the state map can be very uneven.

Some companies inaccurately described both the areas they cover and the speed available. People complained about the inaccuracy of the state map and the illusion the map conveys to policymakers.

In conversations with the State Broadband Director earlier this year, I shared examples of how the map misinformed state leaders. For example, one company advertised speed with the modifier “up to” as in “up to 10 Mg.” However, the company didn’t tell the consumer the only way to get that speed is if he lives right next to the company’s equipment and no other customer tries to get on the Internet.

A few years ago, large companies successfully lobbied to remove state oversight of telecommunication companies. Consumer protections and penalties for companies not complying were removed. This makes keeping companies accountable very difficult. The lack of oversight encourages some companies to look for ways to appear to provide coverage without actually delivering it.

Some companies provide fabulous service at a very reasonable price. They do this despite the lack of oversight by the state. Many of these companies are local, customer-owned cooperatives. The Co-op model provides accountability directly to local customers who serve as the Co-op directors. People with problems call a local person or walk into a local office. In western Wisconsin, cooperatives are leading the way to build out reliable, high speed broadband to rural customers.

Pitted against the smaller local companies are the large telecommunication companies with expensive lobbyists in Madison. The result of the uneven resources between small, local companies and large multi-national companies means the Public Service Commission often

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views the large companies as “walking on water” while having little information about the small local companies who are working the real miracles.

Broadband has become a necessary service to all communities. In the twenty-first century, broadband is as necessary as electric power was nearly one hundred years ago. Businesses cannot function without broadband. Young people know more than many how vital fast Internet is to life today. They are leaving rural Wisconsin because they do not have reliable, fast and unlimited access.

State and federal money has been invested in building out broadband. Too often however the large companies used the access problems in rural Wisconsin to apply for that money and then did not deliver the goods to our underserved areas.

Just tracking the company’s progress in building out service is difficult for the state because there is no independent verification of new customers served.

If you have great service, poor service or no service at all, please take the time to fill out the survey and let your voice be heard. Your investment in time will help those working hard to bring Wisconsin into the twenty-first century.