

Consumer & Governmental Affairs Bureau, the Office of International Affairs, the Broadband Data Task Force and the Office of Economics and Analytics Presentation to Commissioners

January 2025 Open Meeting

Panel 1: Expanding Connectivity and Access to Modern Communications

Presented by:

- **Alejandro Roark**, Bureau Chief, Consumer & Governmental Affairs
- **Jean Kiddoo**, Chair, Broadband Data Task Force
- **Catherine Matraves**, Acting Chief, Office of Economics and Analytics
- **Troy Tanner**, Acting Chief, Office of International Affairs

Slide 2: Introduction

Good morning, and Happy New Year, Madam Chairwoman and Commissioners.

Now more than ever, Americans rely on broadband connections for work, learning, healthcare, and access to the information necessary to make informed decisions about our lives, our communities, and our country. The pandemic highlighted the challenges posed by the lack of broadband access, exposing important truths about the digital divide, the impact of the homework gap, and the consequences of digital isolation.

Today, having access to fast, reliable and affordable internet at home is essential to modern commercial and civic life. It provides the physical and digital connections that can support American innovation and leadership, stimulate economic growth, and create new industries with safer working conditions, and important efficiencies in every sector of our modern economy.

Everyone, whether they reside in rural communities or urban areas, or anywhere in between, needs access to modern communications technologies in order to benefit from the technological advancements transforming the way we live, work, learn, and connect with the world and each other.

During my tenure as Chief of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau under the leadership of Chairwoman Rosenworcel, we have worked to leverage this moment to build a solid foundation for new and inclusive growth and promote the expansion of digital opportunities nationwide.

Specifically, thanks to congressional directives established in the bipartisan infrastructure and jobs act,

Slide 3: ACP Nationwide Outreach & Engagement

We established the Affordable Connectivity Program which successfully addressed one of the most persistent and most cited barriers to broadband adoption – Cost.

The ACP accomplished more to drive social and economic development by bridging our country's digital opportunity divide than any other stand-alone effort in our nation's history and represents an important bipartisan consensus and whole of government/industry/state and local/civil society/community anchor institution effort.

With [over 23 million households](#) enrolled across all 50 states, territories, and federally recognized Tribal Lands, the success, reach, and impact of the program are unmatched.

We set out with a big goal to bridge the digital divide and through this program made significant strides towards achieving that goal by developing an outreach plan which deployed diverse strategies to reach eligible households including:

- Federal Agency Partnerships:
 - US Dept of Housing & Urban Development (HUD),
 - Department of Education (ED),
 - Social Security Administration (SSA),
 - Veterans Affairs (VA),
 - Health & Human Services (HHS),
 - United States Dept of Agriculture (USDA),
 - Department of Interior (DOI)
- The development of the agency's first federal grant program that established a nationwide network of community navigators in every state, territory, and across tribal lands.
- A paid and earned media campaign which resulted in 549 million total advertising impressions across paid search and paid social media ads, 59,103 radio ads, 344 newspaper ads across 84 different publications, 4.2 million mailers and 74 million ad impressions in Spanish, with 42 million of those featured on local radio in communities with large concentrations of likely eligible households.
- The consumer affairs and outreach division, office of native affairs and policy, disability rights office, and the office of intergovernmental affairs collectively hosted over 1500 enrollment events, train the trainer sessions, and provided technical support for local and national outreach partners.
- We also developed program education materials in 10 languages, established a multilingual consumer support center, and a dedicated process to review and address acp complaints to guide our program improvement efforts.
- We did all this while also launching two pilot programs the Your Home Your Internet Program, and the ACP Navigator Pilot Program.

Slide 4: ACP by the Numbers

This was a big effort which yielded some impressive results:

- Represents one in six households nationwide enrolled in under three years
- Served households in every county in the United States
- Nearly half of ACP households are led by someone over the age of 50
- 68% of enrolled households had *inconsistent* connectivity or zero connectivity before the ACP
- 44% of enrolled households used ACP for fixed connections in the home
- 4 million+ households with an active or former military member
- More than 3.4 million households that sought to enroll in the ACP indicated they participate in National School Lunch or Breakfast Program—played a crucial role in addressing the Homework Gap
- 15% of all households in the program are from rural areas

- ~ 330,000 Tribal subscribers enrolled in the program

The ACP helped eligible households connect and save on their monthly internet service bill – and most importantly stay connected—effectively creating new onramps to economic mobility for the country’s hardest to connect populations—proving itself as an effective intervention to increase education attainment, lower unemployment, and stimulate economic growth in every sector of the American economy.

While this program had to come to an end due to a lack of continued Congressional funding, we are hopeful that the foundation we built with the Affordable Connectivity Program can serve as inspiration for any future programs with the same aims: no one should be kept offline due to the cost of an internet connection.

Thank you to all of the teams in the consumer and governmental affairs bureau, our colleagues in the Wireless Competition Bureau and our nationwide network of outreach partners for helping us achieve this important milestone.

Slide 5: Broadband Labels

Along with the establishment of the Affordable Connectivity Program, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law gave the Commission one year to establish regulations requiring the display of broadband consumer labels, as well as directing the Commission to conduct a series of public hearings to assess how consumers evaluate broadband service plans; and whether current broadband disclosures to consumers are sufficient to make an informed choice.

We accomplished both goals.

With this law, Congress directed the FCC to require broadband providers to display, in the form of labels, specific information regarding their internet service plans.

The FCC’s Report and Order formally adopted new rules that require broadband providers to display easy- to-understand labels to allow consumers to comparison shop for internet services. Broadband providers must display, at the point of sale, labels that show the price up front, including any introductory rates, as well as speeds, data allowances, and other critical broadband service information -- including links to information about network management practices and privacy policies.

After input gained at the Commission’s three public hearings and during multiple rounds of public comment – the FCC’s new label rules became effective on April 10, 2024, for large broadband providers and October 10, 2024, for smaller providers with 100,000 or fewer subscriber lines.

The agency is proud of the collaborative and substantive input process that led to the establishment of the labels and marks an important pro consumer win by facilitating greater price transparency and consumer choice in our country’s internet marketplace. The FCC’s new broadband labels empower consumers with easy-to-understand information – so that they can make an informed purchasing decision that matches their household’s internet needs and their long-term budget.

Slide 6: E-Rate & Disability Access

The Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau also worked to promote programs that help to bridge digital disparities on Tribal lands through the modernization of the E-rate program, as well as improving the access and functionality of communications services for people with disabilities.

E-Rate: In 2022 and 2023, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) unanimously approved two orders updating the E-Rate program rules making it easier for Tribal libraries to get E-Rate funding for much-needed telecommunications and information services as well as establishing the Tribal Libraries E-Rate Pilot Program which provides one-on-one technical assistance for Tribal libraries through all phases of the E-Rate application and reimbursement process.

Tribal Libraries are often the only source for free public internet access in their communities, serve large geographic areas, and offer a connection for education, workforce development, and community resource that helps preserve language sacred materials.

Disability Rights Office: The agency has also made important strides to improve the access and functionality for people with disabilities who make up 13% of the population of the United States.

- First by making video programming more accessible for individuals who are blind or have low vision by continuing implementation of the Twenty-First Century Communications and Video Accessibility Act of 2010. In 2023, we phased in the audio description requirement for up to an additional ten Designated Market Areas per year, until all 210 DMAs are covered.
- Second, making smartphones more accessible to people with hearing loss. We adopted new rules requiring that 100% of mobile wireless handset models available in the United States be hearing aid compatible. For the first time, Americans with hearing loss will be able to choose from among the same phones available to consumers without hearing loss. The Commission is also encouraging handset manufacturers to move away from proprietary Bluetooth coupling standards and ensure more universal connectivity between handset models and hearing aids, including over-the-counter hearing aids.
- Third, improving access to video conferencing services to ensure that people with disabilities can fully participate in video conferencing, including by the use of telecommunications relay services. The Commission also took important steps toward ensuring that people with disabilities have full access to video conferencing services. As of September 2024, video conferencing providers have been required to make their services accessible to and usable by people with disabilities. Soon, they will also have to provide captioning options and allow third-party captioning and sign language services to work on their platforms.

This work has been made possible by our expert partners on the Commission's Disability Advisory Committee consisting of 47 dedicated industry, consumer, and governmental agency representatives who collectively developed and submitted thoughtful and useful recommendations on complex topics such as real-time text, accessible streamed as well as live programming, emergency access during the pandemic, best practices for relay services to support individuals with multiple disabilities, direct video calling practices for governmental agencies, and so much more. Thank you all for your time and your partnership.

In addition to these efforts, we also had a dedicated team of colleagues working to develop the most reliable national broadband map in our nation's history – so that we clearly understand the gaps in our country's infrastructure and facilitate effective and targeted investments to expand this critical resource.

Today I am joined on the panel by Jean Kiddoo, Chair, Broadband Data Task Force, Catherine Matraves, Acting Chief, Office of Economics and Analytics, and Troy Tanner, Acting Chief, Office of International Affairs. Jean will provide an update on the agency's Broadband Data Collection and new broadband maps.

Slide 7: Broadband Data Collection (Jean Kiddoo)

Good morning, Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioners Carr, Starks, Simington, and Gomez.

Over the past four years the Commission has completely overhauled its nationwide collection of broadband availability data and created the National Broadband Map. The FCC's older maps collected data at the census block level, meaning that if fixed broadband was available to a single home in a census block, the entire block would show as served on our maps. That's no longer the case.

We also built the first-of-its-kind Broadband Funding Map, which provides an overview of federally funded broadband deployment projects. The Broadband Funding Map plays an important role in interagency coordination for broadband deployment programs, including avoiding the duplication of federal broadband funding efforts.

Reliable availability data is critical to targeting broadband deployment support to areas most in need. The Broadband Data Collection (BDC) has therefore been a high priority for the Commission. Building the data collection, implementing the user-friendly, interactive Map envisioned by Congress, and educating providers and other stakeholders about the new processes, and building the Broadband Funding Map required the expertise of Bureaus and Offices across the Commission. For example:

- The new process required that we develop the Broadband Serviceable Location Fabric – a unique dataset of over 115 million locations – and to build complex IT systems to ingest and validate data and enable third parties to challenge it.
- Commission staff has also engaged in extensive outreach to providers, federal and state agencies, Tribes and other stakeholders and developed numerous resources to educate them about how to submit availability data and submit challenges to help us improve it.
- Staff has also conducted thousands of verification checks of incoming data, engaged with providers to conduct focused verifications and audits, and processed over 4.5 million availability challenges submitted by third parties since November 2022.
- Commission staff have also coordinated extensively with other federal agencies to add data on their federally funded broadband projects to the Broadband Funding Map.

It hardly seems possible that we have released five versions of the National Broadband Map and are now starting our sixth bi-annual data collection. The data have already been used to make data-driven decisions on broadband funding, but the effort is far from over. The Broadband Data Act recognizes that broadband deployment is an ever-changing landscape and envisions an ongoing, iterative process so that we have the most up-to-date, precise information possible to make future funding decisions. While the initial Map was light-years ahead of prior efforts, each Map release has improved and updated that original data.

All this has been accomplished by virtue of intensive work by dedicated staff across the Commission who are committed to assuring that government and industry have the best possible information to target broadband deployment. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the dozens of FCC staff who have worked tirelessly over the past four years to accomplish the National Broadband Map and Broadband Funding Map, and to build a process that will serve the Commission and the American public well over the coming years as we move toward the goal of 100% broadband availability.

I am pleased to turn to my colleague Kate Matraves who will tell you about progress in broadband deployment.

Slide 8: Broadband Deployment Progress (Catherine Matraves)

Good morning, Madam Chairwoman and Commissioners Carr, Starks, Simington, and Gomez.

As Jean mentioned, reliable broadband service availability data is of crucial importance for targeting broadband deployment support to areas most in need. And over the past four years, there has been significant progress in improving broadband deployment across the United States. Everyone in America, no matter where they live or work, must have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service to be able to fully participate in modern life.

In assessing the extent of fixed broadband deployment, we define an *unserved* location as one with speeds of less than 25/3 Mbps, consistent with BEAD and other programs. The BDC data clearly show that the overall number of *unserved* locations continues to trend down. In June 2022, there were just over 8 million unserved locations as compared to approximately 5.1 million unserved locations in June 2024. Federal funding, including the FCC's high-cost program, the American Rescue Plan, and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, as well as state funding and private investment have all contributed to this increased deployment.

In addition, the 2024 Section 706 Report relied on BDC data for the first time to assess broadband service availability and increased the fixed speed benchmark to 100/20 Mbps based on the current state of broadband needs, usage, and deployment. The Report found that, as of December 2022, approximately 24 million Americans (or approximately 7% of the U.S. population) lacked access to broadband service at speeds of at least 100/20 Mbps. The 2024 Communications Marketplace Report found that as of December 2023, approximately 95% of Americans had access to fixed broadband service at speeds of 100/20 Mbps or higher, with approximately 71% of Americans having access to two or fewer providers at those speeds. It also shows that between 2022 and 2023, the percentage of Americans with access to 5G mobile broadband at minimum speeds of 35/3 Mbps increased from 91% to approximately 94%. Our progress in improving the extent of broadband deployment continues to march on.

Thank you so much to all the staff across the Commission who have worked tirelessly with the Broadband Data Collection data, as well as on the Section 706 Report and the 2024 Communications Marketplace Report. And thank you for the opportunity to present today. I am pleased to turn to my colleague, Troy Tanner, to discuss the great work of the Office of International Affairs.

Slide 9: International Leadership – Troy Tanner

Good morning, Madam Chairwoman and Commissioners Carr, Starks, Simington, and Gomez.

The FCC's work to expand access to communications does not stop at the U.S. borders. We cannot achieve our goals without effective advocacy at the international level – particularly for those services that by their very nature are global, but also for advancing the broader goal of an interconnected world.

An example of this is our advocacy in advance of the 2023 World Radio Conference, or WRC-23. The United States was able to achieve outcomes that will support 5G connectivity, pave the way for 6G, and bolster U.S. leadership in the growing space economy.

Our success at the WRC was built on a strong foundation of international relationships, fostered at the staff level all the way to the Chairwoman and Commissioners. Over the last four years, OIA's Internal Visitors Program met with 1,352 representatives and stakeholders across 179 countries and the Chairwoman and Commissioners met with dozens of regulatory counterparts, both at the FCC Headquarters and during trips to international events and foreign bilaterals. Of particular significance is

the FCC's engagement with the Ukrainian regulator, formalized through an MoU the Chairwoman signed in February 2023.

In addition to our bilateral relationships, OIA also works within international organizations to advance FCC policies and United States Government goals. For example, the International Telecommunication Union, or ITU, is a critical venue for advancing policies to expand global connectivity and for negotiating global or regional allocation, harmonization, and efficient use of spectrum and associated orbits. That is why the election of an American – Doreen Bogdan-Martin – to the position of ITU Secretary General in 2022 is so significant. The FCC provided substantial support to that effort, participating in international gatherings and meeting with dozens of counterparts around the world at senior levels to advocate for the U.S. candidate.

In addition to the ITU, we participate in several international organizations, including the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space, the International Civil Aviation Organization, the International Maritime Organization, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, the World Trade Organization, or WTO, and regional communications organizations, such as the Inter-American Telecommunication Commission (or CITELE) in the Americas. As a critical component of our advocacy, we have been successful in getting FCC staff appointed to leadership roles in various international organizations, including within the ITU, CITELE and the WTO.

Thank you, Chairwoman Rosenworcel and Commissioners.