




Connected
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative

Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

Karnes County, Texas Executive Summary

November 2022

**CONNECTED
NATION** 
connectednation.org



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Overview



Today, technology plays a pivotal role in how businesses operate, how institutions provide services, and where consumers choose to live, work, and play. A community's success has become dependent on how broadly and deeply it adopts technology resources, which include access to reliable, high-speed networks, the digital literacy of residents, and the use of online resources for local business, government, and leisure.

As such, Karnes County stakeholders partnered with the Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas) Connected Community Engagement Program to conduct a study designed to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure, how county residents are adopting and using broadband services, and what action steps would have the greatest impact toward improving broadband access, adoption, and usage across every local sector.

Pursuant of this goal, between July and October 2022, Karnes County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community that collected responses from 330 households. CN Texas staff also met with local officials to determine community needs and gather qualitative data for consideration in the study.

This study approached broadband holistically — focusing on the quality of life that results when residents and community leaders alike access, adopt, and use broadband in a productive and meaningful capacity. With this approach, the assessment identified issues and action opportunities to close the local Digital Divide.

Data collected as part of the engagement played an integral role in developing a unique, locally informed action plan for Karnes County. This document provides a summary of that assessment, as well as recommendations for improving broadband and technology access, adoption, and usage. Additionally, CN Texas created an interactive map that can be accessed [here](#).

KARNES COUNTY, TEXAS

QUICK FACTS

Population

14,710

Households

4,552

Median Household Income

\$52,896

Poverty Rate

17.2%

Adults with a Bachelor's Degree
or Higher

15.9%

Hispanic or Latino

52.6%

Households with
Broadband Access¹

100%

Source: [Karnes County US Census Profile](#)

¹The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. These data are derived from Connected Nation Texas and last updated in January 2022. <https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/>



38.8%

of households in
Karnes County
report subscribing
to fixed internet
service



For households that do not subscribe to home internet service, the top barriers are a **lack of broadband service availability** and the **cost of internet service**.

0.09% of households in Karnes County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, **93.6%** of households have internet access at these speeds.

Over 2 out of 3 employed survey respondents in Karnes County (**69.4%**) report teleworking in some capacity. Of those, **34%** telework every day and **18%** telework several days per week.

Nearly 3 out of 4 households surveyed (**71.2%**) and 2 out of 3 businesses (**66.7%**) reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds, unreliable connections, and high prices.

Nearly all households (**99.3%**) said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.



Infrastructure Results



According to CN Texas broadband data initially released in January 2022, followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and internet service provider input, 100% of Karnes County households have access to broadband of at least 25/3 Mbps — the current definition of broadband set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Broadband service is distributed throughout the county.

Below is the list of ISPs in Karnes County. Please contact your provider for the most up-to-date information on speeds, prices, and service areas.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS	
Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)	0
Households Served (10/1 Mbps)	100%
Households Served (25/3 Mbps)	100%
Households Served (50/5 Mbps)	18.46%
Households Served (100/10 Mbps)	0.09%

Broadband data released by CN Texas in January 2022: <https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/>

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AT&T Southwest	DSL	25	2
AT&T Southwest	Fixed Wireless	10	1
Frontier	DSL	50	5
GTEK Communications	Fixed Wireless	50	10
Gulf Coast WiFi	Fixed Wireless	20	5
GVEC.net	Fixed Wireless	25	8
Rural Texas Broadband	Fixed Wireless	10	1
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3
VTX Communications	Fixed Wireless	25	3
ZipLink Internet	Fixed Wireless	20	10

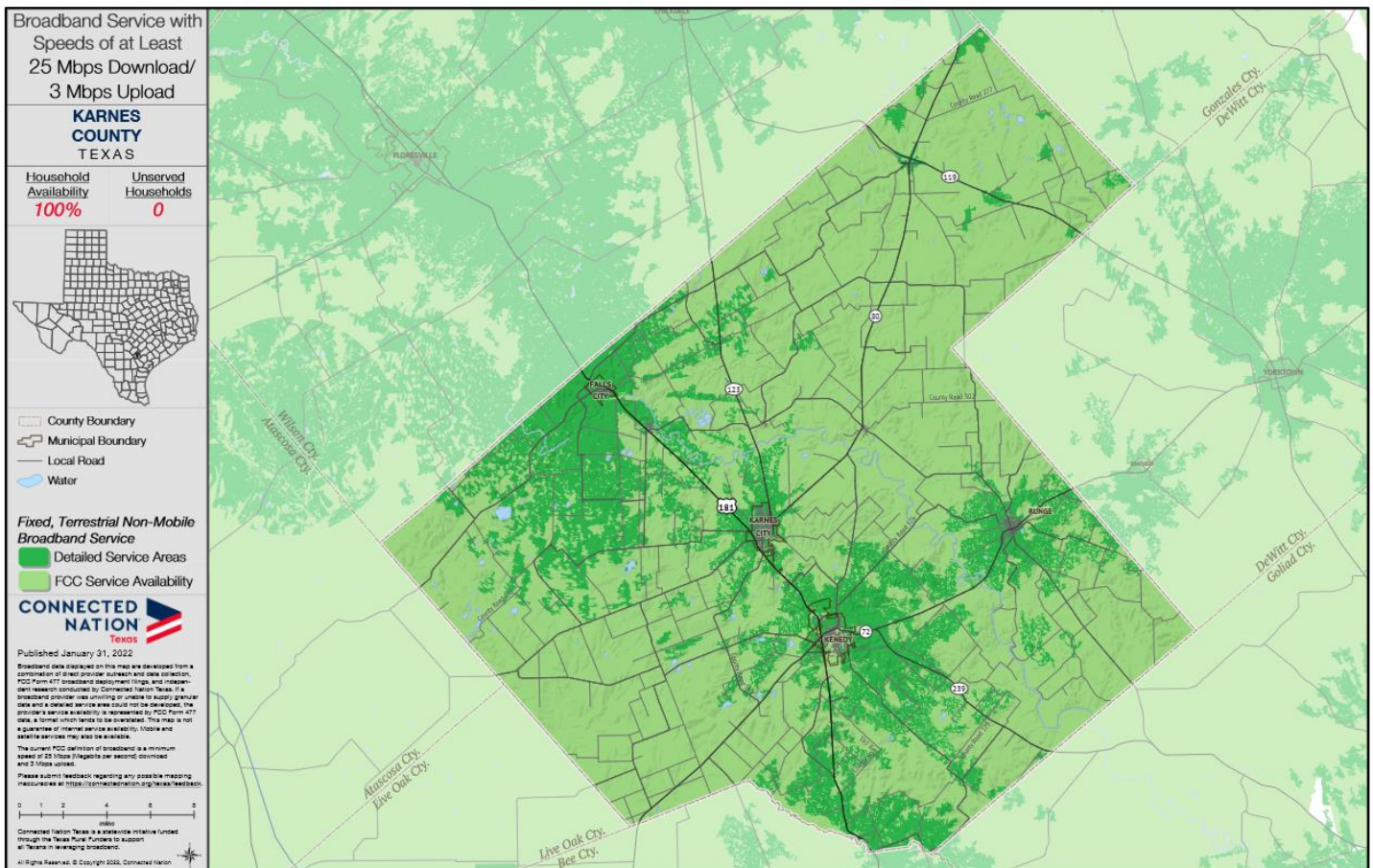
Karnes County Infrastructure



Below is Karnes County's (25/3 Mbps) map. To access the full map, go to <https://connectednation.org/texas/county-maps/> and select Karnes County from the list. Portions of the county are served by ISPs offering slower advertised speeds, and those areas are not shown on this map.

The first step in understanding the status of broadband infrastructure in Karnes County and statewide is having accurate maps. Accordingly, CN Texas works with providers to develop a variety of broadband maps at the state and county level. Data shown on this map are derived from a combination of direct provider outreach and data collection, FCC Form 477 broadband deployment filings, and independent research conducted by CN Texas. If a provider was unable or unwilling to supply granular data and a detailed service area could not be developed, the provider's service is represented by Form 477 data alone — a format that tends to overstate the service territory.

To access the map as a PDF, click [here](#).



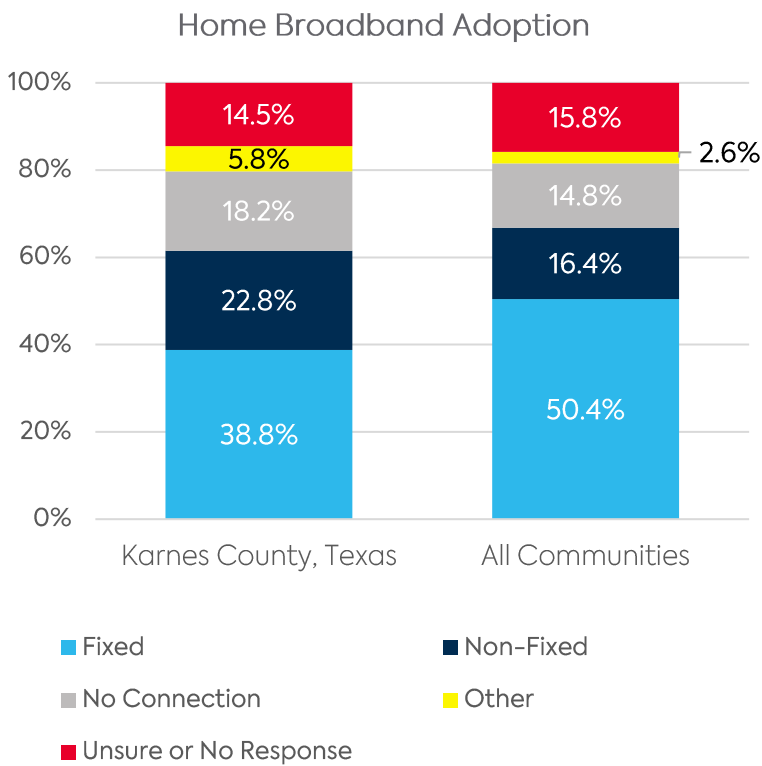


Household Survey Results



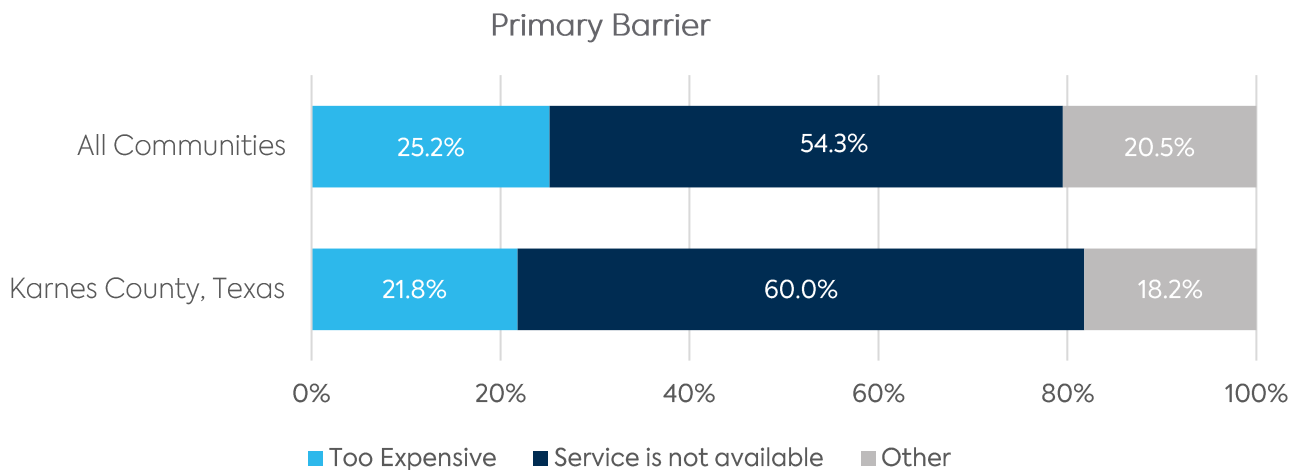
The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Karnes County between July and October 2022. Altogether, CN Texas received 330 survey responses from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Karnes County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities that participated in the program across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

ADOPTION



In Karnes County, 38.8% of households subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology, while 22.8% indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 18.2% without internet and 14.5% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have or provided no response.

Among those without a home internet connection, 21.8% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive. An additional 60% say service is not available.

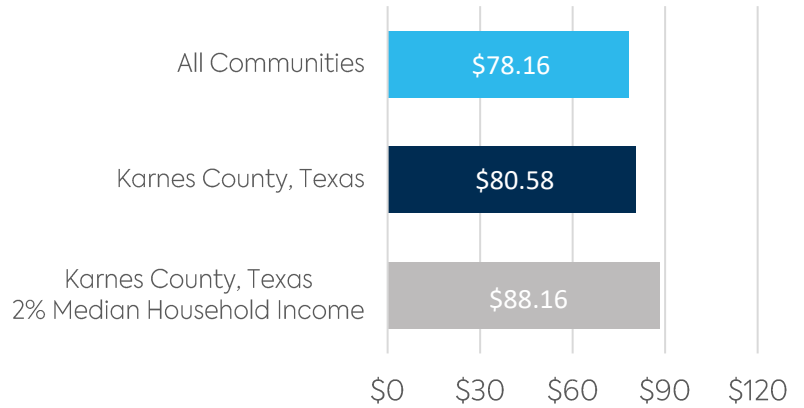




CONNECTION DETAILS

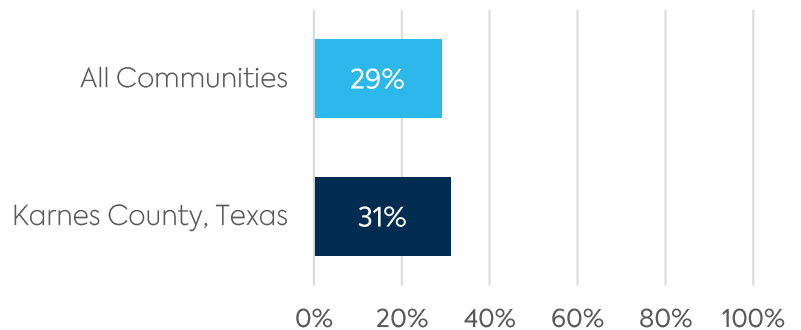
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$80.58 per month. This is higher than the monthly cost paid in other communities (\$78.16). Two percent of the median household income in Karnes County is \$88.16 per month.

Average Monthly Cost

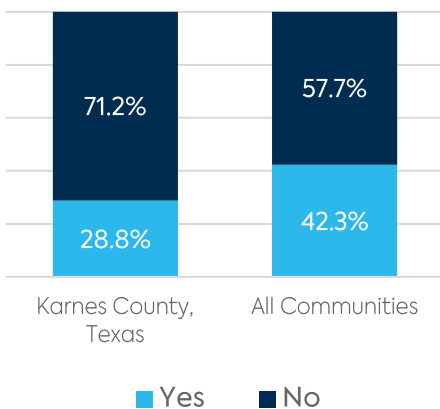


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's advertised download speed is 61.25 Mbps. In Karnes County, 31% of internet-connected households subscribe to download speeds faster than 25 Mbps.

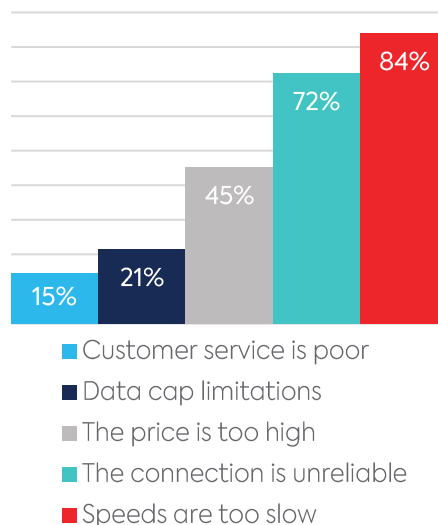
Percentage of Respondents with At Least 25/3 Mbps



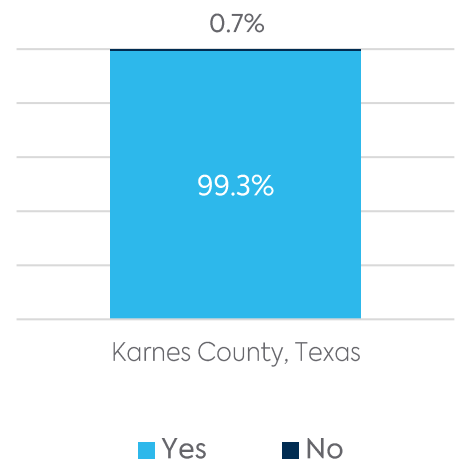
Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?



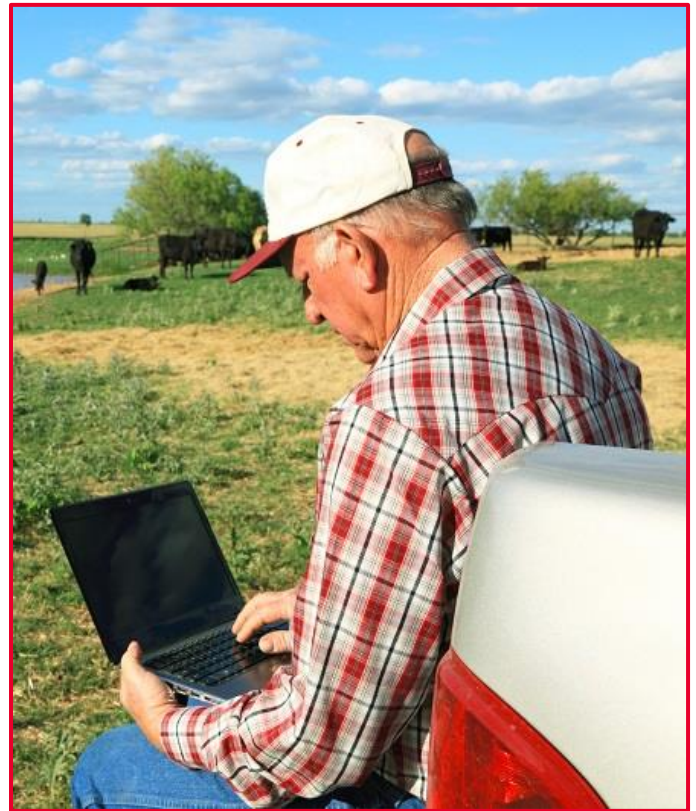
Household Survey Results



Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Less than a third (28.8%) of responding households indicate that their internet connection meets their needs. This is a lower rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (42.3%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 84% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 72% say their connections are unreliable, and 45% indicate that the price is too high. Respondents could choose more than one reason for dissatisfaction.

Finally, almost all respondents (99.3%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

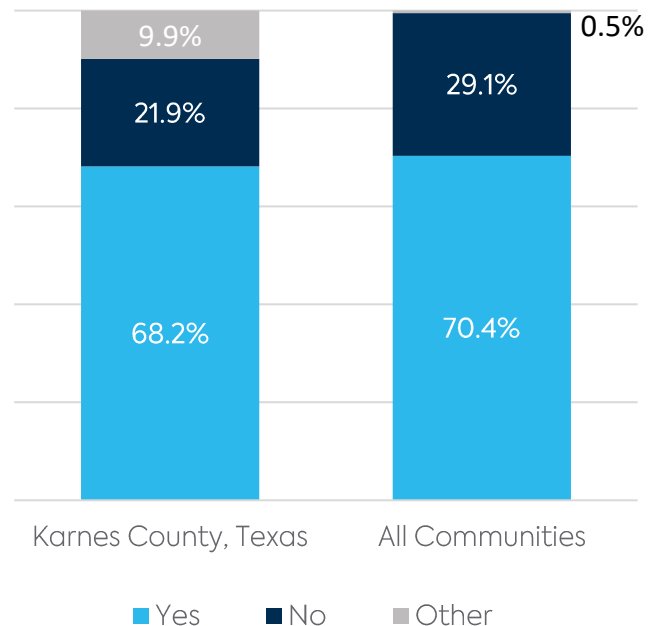


MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

More than 2 out of 3 households (68.2%) reported that they subscribe to mobile internet service that they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is a little less than what is reported in other Connected communities (70.4%).

Additionally, 38.3% of mobile-connected households report that they either rely on those mobile connections as their primary source of home internet connectivity or use mobile service to connect other household devices to the internet.

Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service





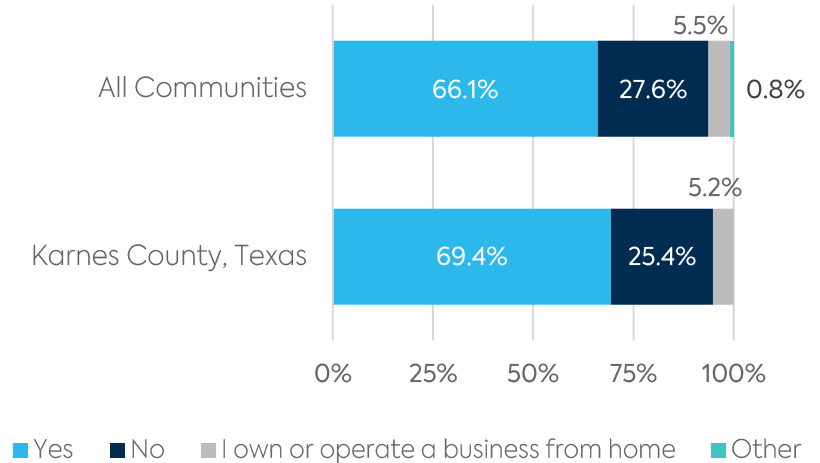
TELEWORK

Teleworking, or telecommuting, refers to working outside of the conventional workplace by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology. The COVID-19 pandemic forced many organizations to allow their staff to telework.

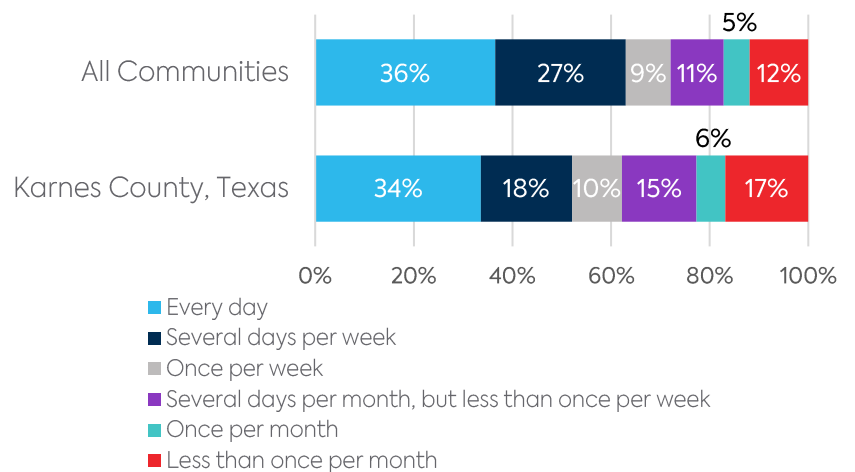
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure.

Over 2 out of 3 employed respondents in Karnes County (69.4%) telework at least part of the time. More than 1 out of 3 teleworkers (34%) work remotely every day, while approximately 62% telework at least once a week.

Do You Currently Telework?



How Frequently Do You Telework?





Recommendations



The following recommendations are presented to assist Karnes County in expanding broadband access and adoption throughout the community.

The need for better, more reliable high-speed internet is a common concern shared amongst residents, businesses, education, and public safety personnel in Karnes County. Although many consider the United States to be in a post-pandemic stage, the lessons learned of not investing in broadband infrastructure, adoption, and usage will carry forward. Students suffered learning losses due to the inability to connect with their teachers, businesses closed their doors, and seniors could not communicate with their health care professionals. Economic growth for rural counties is the lifeblood of a sustainable community, but if industries cannot connect, they cannot contribute to the local economy and will move on. This strategic broadband plan will support Karnes County's efforts to become a digital-ready community.

Goal 1: Establish central broadband leadership in Karnes County.

Objective: Invested and sustained local leadership is a broadband best practice and follows the example of federal and state governments deploying broadband officers in each state.

From July to October 2022, Karnes County, in partnership with Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas), collected surveys across nine community sectors to assess the connectivity, affordability, and general technology needs of Karnes County residents. The local broadband team consisted of Commissioner Shelby Dupnik, County Judge Wade Hedtke, and Michelle Salais, assistant to County Judge. To be more effective and consistent moving forward, a permanent team should be established. With the once-in-a-generation infusion of money coming from federal and state governments, Karnes County must establish a Broadband Technology Action Team to ensure 1.) that the work to improve broadband to date is carried forth, and 2.) that the community is staying on top of local, state, and federal broadband happenings.

Actions:

Action 1: Establish a permanent Broadband Technology Action Team. Karnes County should establish a local network of leaders who are passionate about improving broadband throughout the community and can serve as the go-to point of contact for questions, meetings, and projects. A standing group of leaders is already active in the broadband space; it is only a matter of making it official. This will be especially important as grant opportunities arise. This group should serve as local advisors related to broadband and technology.

The Broadband Technology Action Team should have representation from all community sectors:

- **Health care:** Local physicians or hospital staff: Karnes County Local Health Department



- **Government:** County Judge, County Commissioners, Mayors, City Councils, County IT Director
- **Education (K-12):** Superintendents, Falls City ISD, Karnes ISD, Kenedy ISD, Pawnee ISD, Pettus ISD, Runge ISD
- **Public safety:** Sheriff's Office, Police and Fire Departments, Emergency Management
- **Agriculture:** County Agriculture Agent, leading agriculture producers
- **Business:** Local chambers of commerce and economic development centers
- **Nonprofits and community organizations:** Karnes County Public library, Kenedy Public Library, Falls City Library, Workforce Solutions of Alamo Career Center(s), chambers of commerce
- **Community at large:** Residents who are interested in advancing the broadband agenda of Karnes County

The responsibilities of the team should include:

- Staying up to date on state and federal broadband legislation
- Maintaining open lines of communication with the state Broadband Development Office, including sharing the community's needs
- Applying for applicable state and federal grant programs
- Ensuring digital engagement in Karnes County in all the community sectors (telehealth, telework, online learning, Wi-Fi in businesses, etc.)
- Attending workshops, webinars, meetings, and general training that discuss broadband specifically, and telecommunications generally
- Providing digital literacy and digital skills assistance to the community's at-risk populations
- Participating in regular meetings. The team should meet at least once a month. Meetings can be held virtually, in person, or in a hybrid capacity to accommodate members' needs. These meetings should provide updates on community activities, allow time for guest speakers and presentations, and offer an open forum for discussion about broadband advancements in Karnes County.

Action 2: Develop a Karnes County technology portal/website to promote local broadband resources. The website should serve as a one-stop resource guide for broadband providers, community residents, and local leaders. The website should include resources related to digital literacy, digital skills, reduced-cost broadband offerings, public-computing centers, and other relevant information for residents and internet service providers (ISPs).

Action 3: Track state and national broadband policies. The Texas Broadband Plan, published in June 2022 by the Texas Comptroller's office, reaffirmed what we know to be true: broadband is the foundation for economic growth, job creation, educational opportunities, global competitiveness, and better care in the health care industry. The Broadband Technology Action Team should remain informed and up to date on any publications, events, and policy briefs published by the Governor's Broadband Development Council ([GBDC](#)) and the Broadband Development Office ([BDO](#)). The team



should coordinate ongoing community outreach efforts and initiatives to align with these entities. Local planning and implementation should mirror the successes and objectives laid out by the state of Texas. Taking advantage of federal and state funding as it becomes available will position Karnes County to increase digital opportunities for all residents.

Action 4: Build relationships with internet service providers (ISPs). Meetings with ISPs, including middle-mile vendors, have taken place over the past several months. Establishing relationships with ISPs can open conversations about increasing speeds where needed and decreasing barriers to deployment (such as easement constraints, lease agreements, etc.) When Karnes County leadership talks with ISPs, it brings attention to unserved/underserved areas, and partnerships can be developed to be inclusive of all. The county brings assets, such as towers for antennas or infrastructure, and providers bring know-how to run an internet business. Working together can benefit the community.

Current providers in Karnes County include:

Provider doing business - as name	Technology	Website	Maximum download/upload speed (Mbps)
AT&T Southwest	DSL	http://www.att.com	25/2
AT&T Southwest	Fixed Wireless	http://www.att.com	10/1
Frontier	DSL	https://frontier.com/#	50/5
GTEK Communications	Fixed Wireless	http://www.gtek.biz	50/10
Gulf Coast Wi-Fi	Fixed Wireless	https://gulfcoastwifi.com/	20/5
GVEC.net	Fixed Wireless	http://www.gvec.net	25/8
Rural Texas Broadband	Fixed Wireless	http://www.rtxbb.net	10/1
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	https://t-mobile.com	25/3
VTX Communications	Fixed Wireless	http://vtx1.net/	25/3
ZipLink Internet	Fixed Wireless	http://www.ziplinkinternet.com/	20/10



Responsible parties:

Karnes County Commissioner Court, County Judge, anchor institutions, chambers, and engaged residents.

Timeline:

Building out the Technology Action Team should begin within three months of approval of the Technology Action Plan.

Resources:

[Municipal Boards: Best Practices for Adoption Technology](#)

[Smart Cities Readiness Guide](#)

[Texas Broadband Providers by County](#)

[Becoming Broadband Ready](#)

[How states are expanding broadband access: New research identifies tactics for connecting unserved communities](#)

[Connected Nation: What we do for you](#)

[US Telecom: Preparing your Community for Broadband Success](#)

[For full effect, the broadband expansion will require cooperation](#)

[Texas Broadband Development Office: Funding Resources](#)

[EDA: Economic Adjustment Assistance](#)

[Current Broadband Funding](#)

[Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#)

[Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds. County Allocation](#)

[Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S.](#)

Goal 2: Validate demand for broadband service in underserved areas.

Objective: Validating internet access and speeds can help the county qualify for future grant money and inform providers where there is demand for broadband services.

Residents noted the need for more options and more reliable connections, saying:

- “I would for sure pay more for good fiber internet than I am currently paying.”
- “We need better, more reliable high-speed internet. Some of the companies advertised as ‘high speed’ simply are not. We also need service that doesn’t go out when the wind gets above 5 mph, or we get six drops of rain.”
- “With children in school and college, and going back to school for higher education myself, the need for greater speed is high. Everyone cannot be on our internet service we have now without major lag.”

Federal funding is often critical to spurring additional deployment. Providers operating, or wanting to operate, in Karnes County did not qualify for the Rural Development Opportunities Funds (RDOF)



awarded by the Federal Communications Commission in 2020–21. RDOF criteria allowed for funding to providers in census blocks designated as unserved or underserved at 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload speeds. In Karnes County, 100% of census blocks report having [25/3 Mbps](#); however, residents and businesses consistently report they do not have access to a reliable internet connection. Household survey respondents report the following:

- 71% indicated they are dissatisfied with service, and of that percentage:
 - 84% report speeds are too slow
 - 72% report dissatisfaction because the connection is unreliable
 - 60% of households without a connection do not or cannot subscribe to broadband service because of no access

Business survey respondents mirror these percentages.

Actions:

Action 1: Perform a broadband build-out analysis. Currently, the government uses FCC Form 477 data to establish internet access. Form 477 data is often overstated, and Karnes County maps showing 100% access of 25/3 Mbps may be inaccurate.

Gathering additional data could help the Broadband Technology Action Team understand the reasons why some areas of the community remain unserved. It can also help determine the feasibility of deploying various internet systems in the defined area and generate a business case for deployment.

This analysis of unserved and underserved areas will help the Broadband Technology Action Team understand local assets and any barriers to broadband deployment. The team should solicit feedback from residents of the unserved territory on their demand. A broadband build-out analysis could include:

1. **Field validation:** Conduct on-site visual assessments of the defined geographic areas that are unserved or underserved by broadband coverage. The assessment determines the feasibility of deploying various internet systems in a defined area by gathering site-specific information required for (i) determining the use of existing infrastructure, (ii) designing wired and wireless internet systems using these assets, and (iii) expanding broadband coverage in the defined area. CN Texas can help with this work if requested.
2. **Community broadband survey follow up:** Use the results of the CN Texas Residential Technology Survey to identify pockets of demand in areas without service. These results provide information on currently adopted speeds and costs. The Broadband Technology Action Team can also solicit more in-depth feedback from residents who live in neighborhoods in the unserved areas to determine the exact need, or in communities where more residential survey data is needed.



3. **Market analysis:** A market analysis should also be performed to identify potential broadband providers, and understand potential service offerings, and respective rates.
4. **Investment:** Results of the studies should be analyzed and released to providers to inform a business case for expansion or upgrades.
5. **Provider engagement:** Community broadband team members should include broadband providers in discussions of access expansion. Providers may have expansion plans that communities are not aware of, or have expansion infrastructure requirements due to federal commitments, (e.g., Connect America Fund).

Responsible parties:

County and local units of government with a high number of underserved households; Karnes County broadband team broadband providers; residents and businesses

Resources:

[Connected Nation: What we do for you](#)

[Promoting transparency and competition in broadband markets](#)

[Broadband expansion will require cooperation](#)

[The benefits and costs of broadband expansion](#)

[Supporting Technology-Based Economic Development is key to EDA's Mission](#)

[Improving the Quality of Life in Rural America with Broadband Internet](#)

Goal 3: Pursue reliable internet access and speeds to further expand public safety network access.

Objective: Survey responses and community conversations indicate an urgent need for public safety is access and securing a reliable connection to the internet in the most rural parts of the county.

The average speeds reported by public safety survey respondents are 20/5 Mbps. Commissioner Dupnik, who also serves as the Emergency Management Coordinator, reports there is no redundancy for mobile internet service. Therefore, all or parts of the county could be without internet during an emergency. He stated, "Internet service went out the other day because someone cut a fiber line and the county had no service." The County needs to address this by asking what the most immediate requirements are to meet public safety technology communication needs now, as well as where the community needs to be in ten years.

Actions:

Action 1: Maintain a clear understanding of Karnes County's technology responsibilities and the state of Texas' obligations when deploying emergency management technology and other communications (i.e., NextGen 911).



Action 2: Perform a field validation in the rural areas of the county. As discussed in Goal 2, this will confirm where there is access to the internet and where there is not, and identify any redundancy technology.

Action 3: Engage with ISPs and produce a plan to provide infrastructure, increase speeds, and provide redundancy capabilities.

Public safety should explore additional backup services that would serve as cutover services when primary services experience outages. This is not simply service from a secondary provider, but service from an ISP that offers an entirely different physical path. This will help restore critical services quickly during outages through primary services. It is good practice for any entity that deems connectivity vital and mission critical to the continuity of their services or business to consider their options and develop a plan that will allow for the mitigation of service disruptions. An example, to help mitigate service disruptions for 911 services, it would be good practice to have a back-up, 10-digit 911 roll over number that does not use the same network as the main line, so that calls can stay in the county during outages.

Action 4: Leverage existing community assets in tandem with private sector carriers to expand broadband network deployment via public-private partnerships.

A public-private partnership is not simply a method of financing. The strength of these partnerships is that each party brings something important to the table that the other does not have or cannot easily acquire. The community can offer infrastructure (publicly owned building rooftops, light poles, towers, and other vertical assets for mounting infrastructure) for the deployment of a network, as well as committed anchor tenants. Private-sector partners bring network-building and operations experience. Here are some steps to consider when embarking on P3s.

1. **Determine priorities:** Competition, enhanced service, equity and service to all, public control over infrastructure, risk avoidance, redundancy, etc.
2. **Examine models of partnership:**
 - a. Model 1 — Private Investment, Public Facilitation: Make available public assets such as fiber and conduit, share geographic information systems (GIS) data, streamline permitting and inspection processes, offer economic development incentives to attract private broadband investment.
 - b. Model 2 — Private Execution, Public Funding: Identify revenue streams that can be directed to a private partner, and issue an RFP for a private turnkey execution.
 - c. Model 3 — Shared Investment and Risk: Evaluate using assets to attract private investment, evaluate funding new assets to attract private investment, and evaluate building new fiber assets to businesses and/or homes for leasing to private ISPs.
3. **Understand key legal considerations for localities looking to build a broadband partnership:** Review authority issues, understand the legal tools and instruments that could shape the partnership, and negotiate the agreement.



Responsible parties:

Local units of government, emergency management coordinator; ISPs; community anchor institutions; residents and businesses

Timeline:

Research and plans should be made after the Technology Action Team is formed. The Team should be formed within three months of acceptance of this Technology Action Plan.

Resources:

[Rural Emergency Preparedness and Response](#)

[T-Mobile for Government](#)

[Cradlepoint for Law Enforcement](#)

[FirstNet by AT&T](#)

[Next Generation 911 Telemedicine Medical Services Pilot Project](#)

[Wisconsin Broadband Infrastructure Projects](#)

[Local Telcos Win Broadband PPPs with Texas County](#)

[Broadband Toolkit](#)

[Case Studies in PPP Driving Broadband Deployment](#)

[Time to seek public-private partnerships for broadband networks](#)

[The Wake of COVID-19](#)

[Cybersecurity & Infrastructure Security Agency \(CISA\), resource list](#)

[10 Keys to Public Safety Network Resiliency](#)

Goal 4: Provide public telehealth locations for students and the community.

Objective: Providing telehealth in schools promotes health care for all students, improves attendance, and care can be provided with or without insurance.

With learning loss due to the pandemic, students need to be in school. Making available public telehealth stations allows residents to receive medical attention when a physical doctor visit is not possible or necessary.

Actions:

Action 1: Explore school telehealth programs to provide health care and testing for common ailments such as strep, flu, and COVID-19. Currently, only Karnes City ISD subscribes to a student telehealth service — [Goodside Health](#). Goodside Health allows immediate access to physical and behavioral health care via the internet. It is offered free of charge to the students and endorsed by [Superior HealthPlan](#).

Responsible parties:



Karnes County school districts:

- Falls City Independent School District
- Karnes City Independent School -
- Kenedy Independent School District
- Pawnee Independent School District
- Pettus Independent School District
- Runge Independent School District

Action 2: Convene a countywide discussion on how telehealth can be implemented in public spaces. Anchor institutions can play a leading role in offering safe telehealth locations.

It is important to recognize that many libraries and other nonprofits offer services that are not considered part of their core mission. There are successful examples of libraries making a dramatic difference in their communities by offering a safe place for residents to seek telehealth care. Libraries can offer private rooms for patient visits, secure internet connections, and technology support to ensure patients can complete telehealth visits successfully.

This countywide conversation can be led by the Broadband Technology Action Team, which should include members from the health care sector and anchor institutions. Coordinating deployment of telehealth resources, whether in schools, libraries, or through nonprofit outreach, is critical to reach the patients in most need of these services.

An article entitled, [Public Libraries Tackle Telehealth Challenges](#), provides examples and resources on how to get started.

CN Texas also offers many open-source resources and information about telehealth, including a five-part webinar, research papers, and blogs. More information can be found [here](#).

Timeline:

Telehealth services are available and should be implemented in the school districts within three months of acceptance of the Technology Action Plan. Community meetings should take place when an expert from the telehealth field can be scheduled to attend.

Resources:

Resources available in the hyperlinks above
[Pottsboro Area Library](#)

Goal 5 – Increase free Wi-Fi services in public areas and provide resources for low-cost broadband options.



Objective: Providing free Wi-Fi in public places and low-cost options for residents can help close the Digital Divide.

Based on ISP conversations with Connected Nation and the broadband team, there is interest to partner with the County to bring broadband to all. Unfortunately, if people can not afford internet services, adoption is not possible.

In Karnes County, over 21% of survey participants without a connection do not or can not subscribe to broadband services because it is too expensive. With an aggressive strategic plan to connect the county to reliable and affordable broadband, Karnes County can begin to close the Digital Divide.

Actions:

Action 1: Promote programs that help residents overcome the affordability barrier to broadband adoption. Karnes County should collaborate with community leaders and institutions to publicly promote programs and opportunities designed to reduce the cost of broadband service. This can be done by sending notices out with water bills, posting notices in the newspaper or monthly school newsletters, discussing programs at Commissioners' Court or City Hall meetings, or advertising affordability programs at frequently visited community buildings and businesses.

Below are some programs and resources that could be promoted to residents:

- **Resources to locate affordable internet service or computers:** Using online resources, Karnes County residents can identify local and national providers who offer special, low-cost services for vulnerable populations, older adults, and low-income families with children. Such resources include [EveryoneOn](#), which helps residents locate low-cost internet services and affordable computers by ZIP code and need based on their participation in assistance programs.
- **Information about low-cost internet services offered by providers:** In Karnes County, AT&T offers the [Access from AT&T](#) program for \$10 per month or less based on the maximum speed available at the subscriber's address, with speeds up to 25Mbps. This is subject to household eligibility and service availability at a specific address. Prices are subject to change, so residents are advised to check with their providers.
- **State and federal low-cost programs:** Two critical programs offer discounts on broadband to eligible households:
 - **Lifeline Program:** This is a government assistance program run by the Public Utility Commission of Texas that provides a discount to qualifying low-income customers who subscribe to voice telephone service or broadband internet service. The Lifeline discount for qualifying low-income customers may be up to \$12.75 per month (\$3.50 state discount and \$9.25 federal Lifeline discount), depending on the services a



- resident subscribes to and their eligibility. Lifeline service is non-transferable and is limited to one discount per household.
- o **The Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP):** This program is run by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to help low-income households pay for internet service and connected devices such as a laptop or tablets. A complete list of Texas providers offering ACP discounts can be found [here](#). For a full list of providers by city, state, or ZIP code that offer this service, please click [here](#).

Action 2: Make public Wi-Fi available throughout Karnes County and share these locations with the community. The Broadband Technology Action Team should document and promote an inventory of public Wi-Fi locations in the community, focusing on institutions that are frequented by residents. This can be done by asking community businesses and anchor institutions if they have public Wi-Fi available at their locations and asking public libraries how many Wi-Fi hotspots and public computers they have available. With this information, the team can compile a list of community hotspot availability in public places. This information can be hosted on the broadband resource webpage and promoted in physical locations around the county. Additionally, developing plans to provide public Wi-Fi in areas where people attend recreational activities, such as parks, tourist attractions, and other recreational centers, can significantly expand public access.

Action 3: Convene community anchor institutions such as libraries, community centers, and senior centers that host public computers to discuss their key role in providing open, public internet access to residents in downtown areas or other public spaces. This is a simple, straightforward way to encourage the community to participate in bridging the Digital Divide. Other opportunities may exist with religious facilities, schools, local government offices, RV parks, restaurants, or various social service providers that offer services in English and Spanish.

Responsible parties:

The Technology Action Team; librarians; commissioners; county judge; local chambers; churches; ISPs

Timeline:

An inventory of library broadband offerings and other free public broadband resources should be performed within three months of acceptance of this plan.

Resources:

[The Affordable Connectivity Program](#) is designed to supplement the cost of internet services to households who qualify

[Lifeline Program designed to help with monthly phone and internet costs](#)

[Ideas to reduce your monthly billing](#)

[FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel responds to Rep. Mrvan on improving veterans' access to broadband](#)
[Should cities offer free Wi-Fi?](#)

[How one city provided free Wi-Fi to their businesses](#)

[Keeping Communities Connected spotlights creative library broadband services during the pandemic](#)



[Filling the gap: Wi-Fi hotspots for a rural community](#)

[5 Reasons Why Libraries are Essential to Have](#)

[It Takes a Village: Solving the Broadband Adoption Problem in Rural America](#)

Additional resources on digital literacy and closing the digital skills gap:

[Connected Nation offers free digital literacy classes](#)

[Implementing Productive Teleworking with Business-Quality Mobile Communications](#)

[The complete guide to digital skills](#)

[AARP Joins with Nonprofit to Teach Tech to Older Adults](#)

[Digital Learn: Use a computer to do almost anything!](#)

[Promoting digital literacy for adult learners: a resource guide](#)

[Grow with Google](#)

[GCFLearnFree.org® program](#)

[National Digital Inclusion Alliance](#)

[First-Ever National Study: Millions of People Rely on Library Computers for Employment, Health, and Education \(Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation\)](#)

[Senior Connect: Connecting Seniors in Central Texas](#)

[Plainfield Public Library to Offer Computer Literacy Training](#)

[Closing the digital skills gap: Opportunity Las Cruces](#)

[Orleans County Digital Literacy Initiative](#)