



Connected
A CONNECTED NATION Initiative

Addressing Your Community's Unique Needs

Hays County, Texas Executive Summary

September 2022

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NATION** 
connectednation.org



Connected Nation thanks St. David's Foundation for funding this project

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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, the Hays County Broadband Committee partnered with the Connected Nation Texas (CNTX) 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 March and June 2022, Hays County conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across the community that collected responses from 1,469 households. CNTX staff also met with community 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 offered 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 necessary 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 Hays County. This document provides a summary of that assessment, as well as recommendations for improving broadband and technology access, adoption, and usage. Additionally, CNTX created an interactive map. To access that map, please click [here](#).

HAYS COUNTY, TEXAS QUICK FACTS

Population
255,397

Households
76,724

Median Household Income
\$68,724

Poverty Rate
12.7%

Adults with a Bachelor's Degree
or Higher
38.6%

Hispanic or Latino
38.2%

Households with
Broadband Access¹
99.16%

Source:

<https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?q=0500000US48209>
<https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/popest/2020s-counties-detail.html>

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/>



66.4%

of households in
Hays County
report subscribing
to fixed internet
service



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

*Most households in Hays County (**95.45%**) have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, **93.55%** of households have internet access at these speeds.*

*Nearly 3 out of 4 employed survey respondents in Hays County (**73.9%**) report teleworking in some capacity. Of those, **42%** telework every day, and an additional **29%** telework several days per week.*

*The majority of households (**54.7%**) and businesses (**63.9%**) reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds, high prices, and unreliable connections.*

*More than 9 out of 10 households (**94.3%**) said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.*



Infrastructure Results



According to CNTX broadband data initially released in January 2022, followed by additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input, 99.16% of Hays 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 in Hays County is distributed throughout the county.

Data shown on this table 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. Form 477 access data is based on Census Block spatial boundaries and FCC reporting criteria, where if any portion of the Block area is serviceable then the entirety of that area is geographically reported as served. Fieldwork completed by Connected Nation Texas in limited areas of Hays County did indicate signs of census block overstatement.

BROADBAND INFRASTRUCTURE QUICK FACTS

Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)
465

Households Served (10/1 Mbps)
99.77%

Households Served (25/3 Mbps)
99.16%

Households Served (50/5 Mbps)
95.76%

Households Served (100/10 Mbps)
95.45%

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





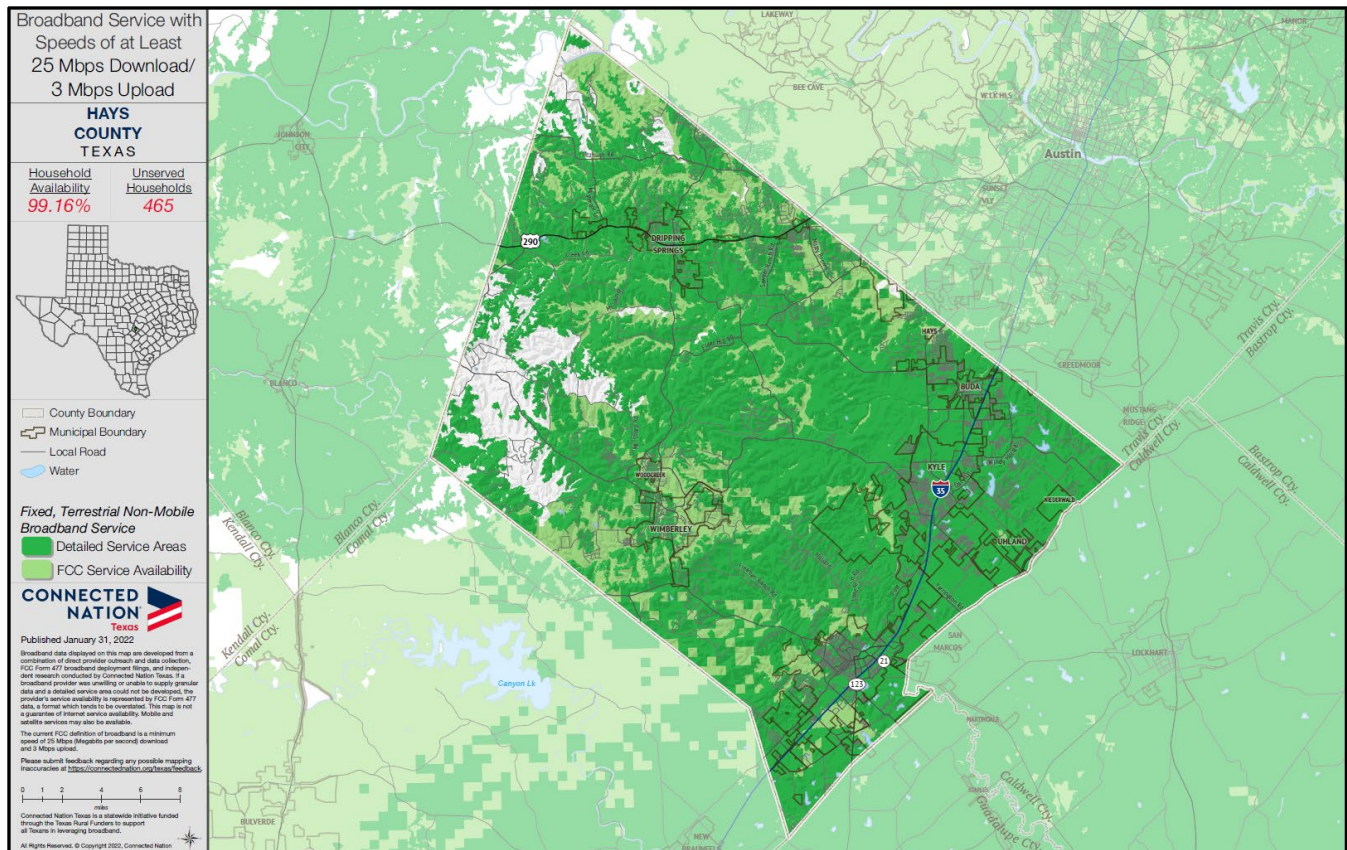
Below is a list of internet service providers (ISPs) in Hays County.

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
Anvil Communications	Fixed Wireless	25	5
En-Touch Systems (Astound Broadband)	Fiber	1000	1000
	Cable	115	20
Grande Communications (Astound Broadband)	Fiber	1000	1000
Networks LLC (Astound Broadband)	Cable	1000	50
AT&T Southwest	Fiber	1000	1000
	DSL	100	20
CenturyLink	Fiber	940	940
	DSL	80	10
GHz Wireless	Fixed Wireless	50	5
GVEC.net	Fixed Wireless	25	8
GVTC	Fiber	1000	250
	DSL	12	1.5
HC Wireless	Fixed Wireless	100	25
Hillcountry Wireless and Technology	Fixed Wireless	100	25
	Fixed Wireless	50	10
Particle Communications	Fixed Wireless	25	10
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	50	10
Spectrum (Charter)	Cable	940	35
	Fiber	940	35
Spry Wireless Inc.	Fixed Wireless	30	10
Texas Wireless Internet	Fixed Wireless	10	1
T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	25	3
VTX Communications	Fixed Wireless	25	3
Zeecon Wireless	Fixed Wireless	10	1

Hays County Infrastructure



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



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

The first step in understanding the status of broadband infrastructure in Hays County and statewide is having accurate maps. Accordingly, CNTX 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 CNTX. 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](#).



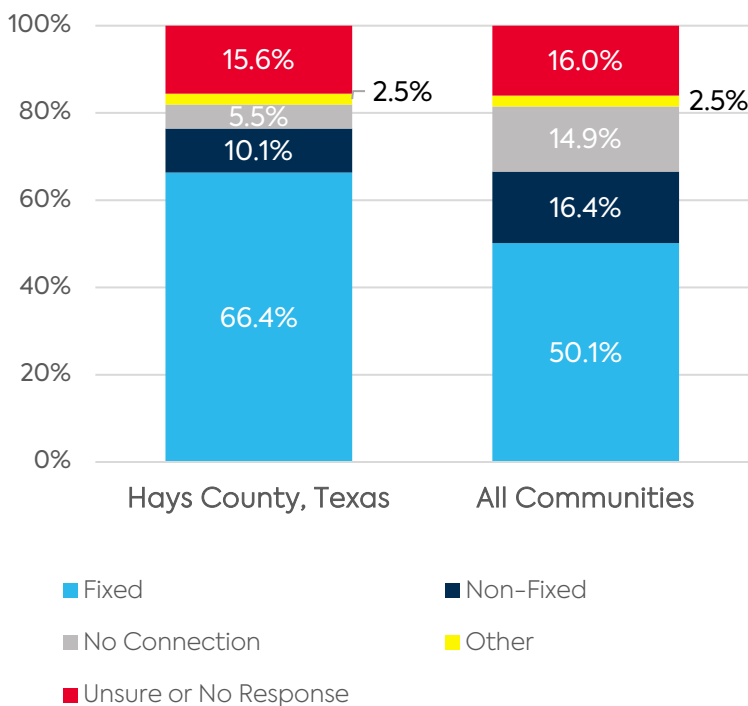
Household Survey Results



The following section provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Hays County between March and June 2022. Altogether, CNTX received 1,469 completed surveys from households across the county; respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Insights from Hays County are compared to data from hundreds of other rural Connected communities that participated in the program across Michigan, Ohio, and Texas to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

ADOPTION

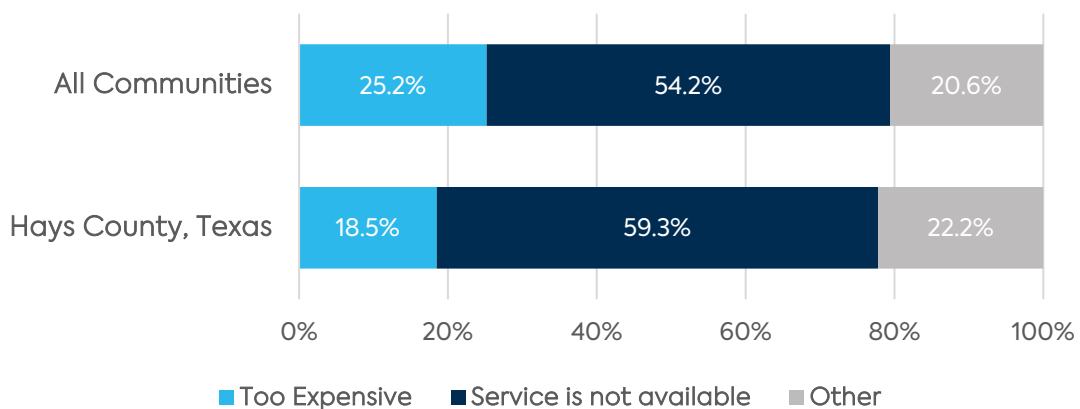
Home Broadband Adoption



In Hays County, 66.4% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology, while 10.1% indicate they have internet service delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 5.5% without internet and 15.6% of survey respondents unsure of what service they have or provided no response.

Among those without a home internet connection, 18.5% said they did not have broadband because it was too expensive. An additional 59.3% say service is not available.

Primary Barrier



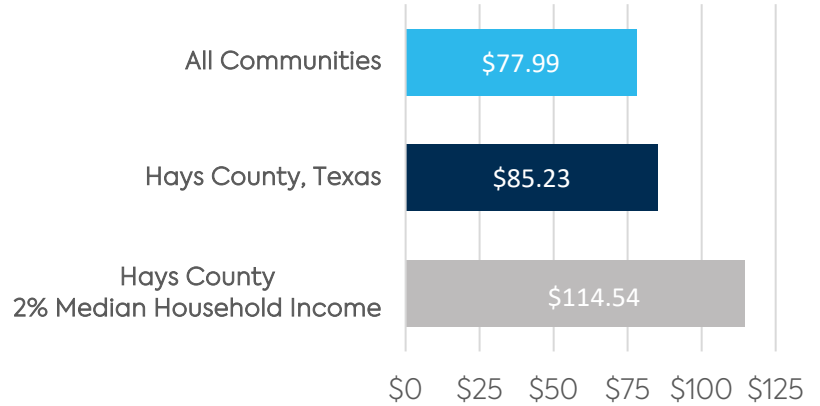


CONNECTION DETAILS

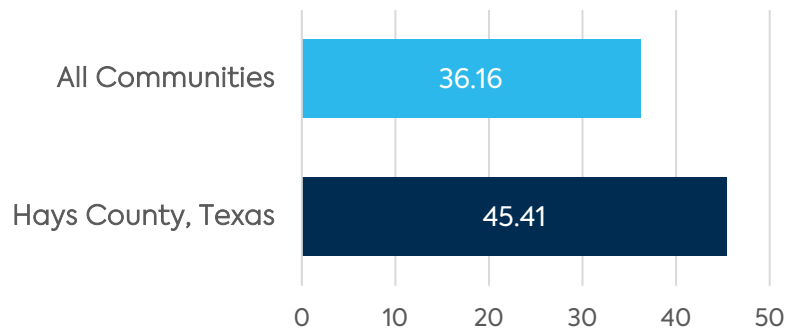
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs about \$85.23 per month. This is higher than the monthly cost paid in other communities (\$77.99). Two percent of the median household income in Hays County is \$114.54 per month.

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 download speed is 45.41 Mbps, which is above the minimum defined speed.

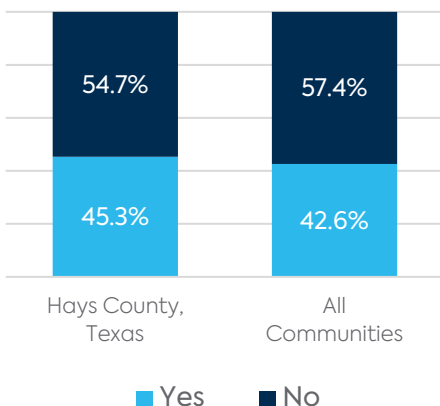
Average Monthly Cost



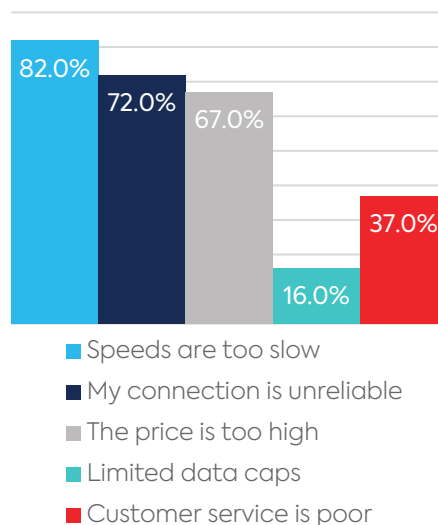
Average Speeds (Mbps)



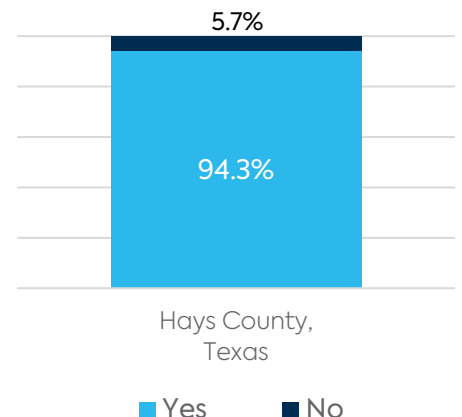
Does Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Why Doesn't Your Internet Meet Your Needs?



Are You Interested in More Choices at Home?

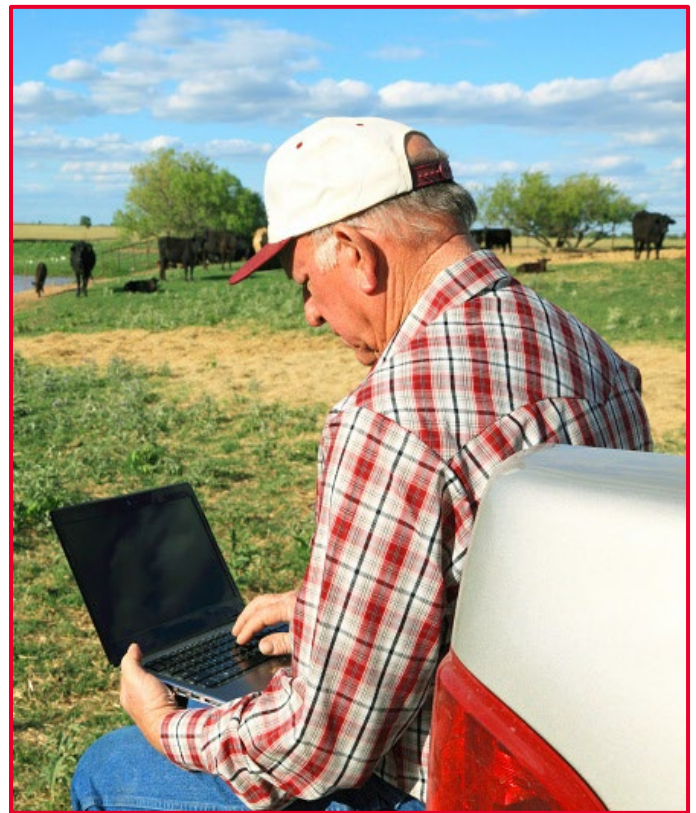




Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Fewer than one-half (45.3%) of responding households indicate that their internet connection meets their needs. This is a slightly higher rate of satisfaction than among households in other communities (42.6%).

When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 82% of dissatisfied households indicate that their speed is too slow, 72% say their connections are unreliable, and 67% indicate that the price is too high. Respondents could choose more than one reason for dissatisfaction.

Finally, nearly all respondents (94.3%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

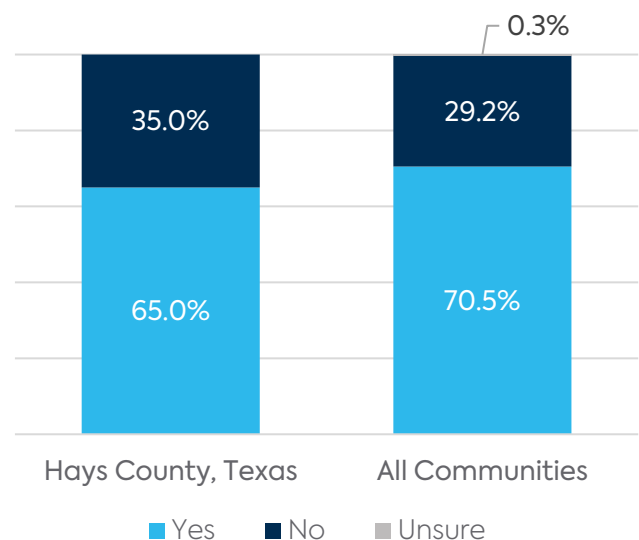


MOBILE CONNECTIVITY

Almost 2 out of 3 households (65%) 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 (70.7%).

Additionally, 17.4% 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





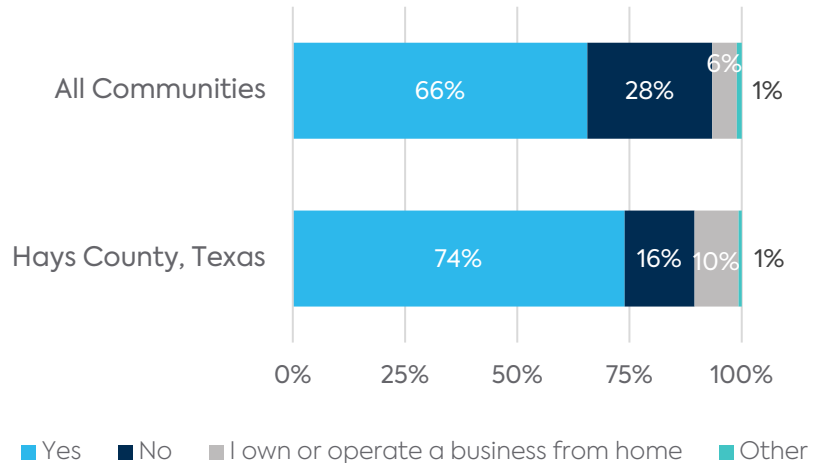
TELEWORK

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.

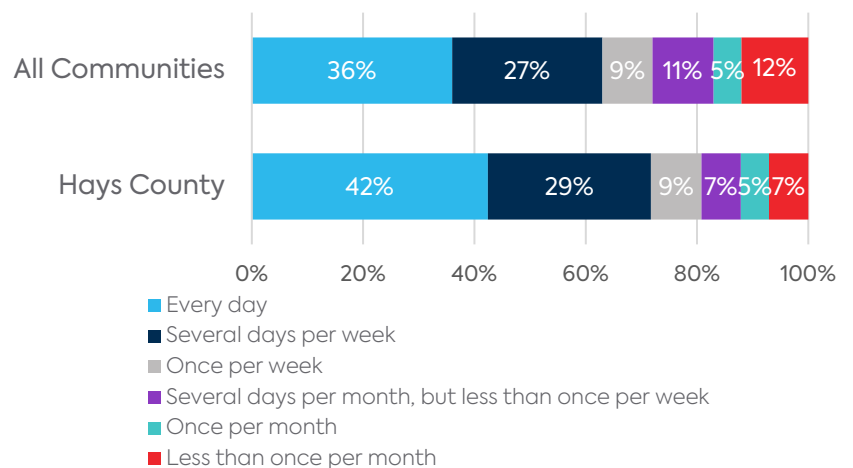
Teleworking is quickly becoming a critical part of growing a local economy because it represents an opportunity to attract and retain employees even when employees are not located in the same community as their employers. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure.

Nearly 3 out of 4 employed respondents in Hays County (74%) telework in some capacity. Two out of 5 of those teleworkers (42%) telework every day.

Do You Currently Telework?



How Frequently Do You Telework?





Recommendations



The Texas Broadband Plan (TBP) was published in June 2022 by the Broadband Development Office within Texas Comptroller's office. It 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 pandemic highlighted not only the importance of a high-speed internet connection, but also the Digital Divide was brought into full view. Images of students sitting outside of libraries and other business establishments trying to connect to the internet have forever changed our view of broadband equity. Seniors who were unable to travel to doctor appointments highlighted the need for telehealth and reliable internet to connect with health care providers and family.

Goal 1: Establish central broadband leadership in Hays County by making permanent the Technology Action Team formed during Connected Nation's Engagement program

Objective: Establish a permanent Technology Action Team in Hays County that can serve as the go-to point of contact for questions, meetings, and projects.

From March to June 2022, the Hays County Broadband Team, in partnership with Connected Nation Texas (CNTX), collected surveys across nine community sectors to assess the connectivity, affordability, and general technology needs of Hays County residents. The local broadband team, led by Simone Corprew, County Judge Ruben Becerra, and county commissioners, brought together community stakeholders spanning education, government, health care, business, and technology. With the once-in-a-generation infusion of funding available from the federal and state governments, it is paramount that Hays County establishes a Technology Action Team to ensure 1) the work to improve broadband to date is carried forth, and 2) the community is staying on the top the of state, local, and federal broadband happenings.

Action 1 – Establish a permanent Technology Action Team.

Hays County should establish a local network of leaders who are passionate about improving broadband throughout the community. A standing group of leaders is already active in the broadband space; it's a matter of making this team official. This will be especially important as grant opportunities arise. This group should serve as a local group of advisors for activity related to broadband and technology.

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

- **Health Care:** Local physicians or hospital staff, Hays County Health Department
- **Government:** County Judge, County Commissioners, Mayors, City Councils, County IT Director
- **Education (K-12):** Superintendents, School IT Directors, Hays CISD, Dripping Springs ISD, Wimberley ISD, San Marcos ISD, and charter schools



- **Education (Higher Education):** Texas State University, Austin Community College
- **Public Safety:** Sheriff's Office, Police and Fire Departments, Emergency Management
- **Agriculture:** County Ag Agent, leading agriculture producers
- **Business:** Local chambers of commerce and economic development centers
- **Nonprofits and Community Organizations:** Kyle Public Library, Buda Public Library, San Marcos Public Library, Dripping Springs Community Library, Wimberley Village Library, Workforce Solutions of Hays County, United Way-Hays County
- **Community at Large:** Residents who are interested in furthering the broadband agenda of Hays County

The responsibilities of the team should include:

- Staying up to date on state and federal broadband legislation
- Applying for applicable state and federal grant programs
- Ensuring digital engagement in Hays County in all 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 Hays County

Action 2 – Continue to update the Hays 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 Technology Action Team should remain informed and up to date on any publications, events, and policy briefs published by 1) the Governor's Broadband Development Council ([GBDC](#)) and 2) the Broadband Development Office ([BDO](#)). The team should coordinate ongoing community outreach efforts and initiatives following the long-term objectives of the aforementioned entities. Local broadband teams 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 Hays County to increase digital opportunities for all residents.



Action 4 – Build relationships with internet service providers (ISPs), starting with the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) winners.

The FCC preliminarily awarded funds to ISPs to deploy infrastructure to unserved/underserved areas. This included locations with no internet access or less than 25/3 Mbps.

Two ISPs new to Hays County were tentatively awarded federal money to deploy broadband to areas that currently do not have a least 25/3 Mbps.

- LTD – adding 12 new locations and receiving \$17,574
- Resound Networks – adding 2,515 new locations and receiving \$1,282,858

The areas can be viewed on [CNTX maps](#).

Establishing relationships with ISPs can open conversations about increasing speeds where needed and discussing barriers to deployment (such as easement constraints, lease agreements, etc.). Hays County leaders talking with ISPs can bring attention to unserved/underserved areas, and partnerships can be developed to be inclusive of all areas. The county has assets such as towers for antennas or infrastructure, and ISPs have knowledge on how to run an internet business. Working together can benefit the community.

Other ISPs in Hays County (Data published January 31, 2022, CNTX):

PROVIDER	DOING BUSINESS AS	TECHNOLOGY	WEBSITE	MAX. DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAX. UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
Anvil Communications Inc.	Anvil Communications	Fixed Wireless	http://www.anvilcom.com/	25	5
En-Touch Systems Inc.	Astound Broadband	Fiber	http://www.astound.com/texas/	1000	1000
Grande Communications Networks LLC	Astound Broadband	Fiber	https://www.astound.com/texas/	1000	1000
Grande Communications Networks LLC	Astound Broadband	Cable	https://www.astound.com/texas/	1000	50
En-Touch Systems Inc.	Astound Broadband	Cable	http://www.entouch.net/	115	20
SW Bell Telephone Co. L.P	AT&T Southwest	Fiber	http://www.att.com	1000	1000
SW Bell Telephone Co. LP	AT&T Southwest	DSL	http://www.att.com	100	20
CenturyLink Inc.	CenturyLink	Fiber	http://www.centurylink.com/	940	940
CenturyLink Inc.	CenturyLink	DSL	http://www.centurylink.com/	80	10
GHz Communications Inc.	GHz Wireless	Fixed Wireless	http://www.ghzwireless.com	50	5
GVEC.net	GVEC.net	Fixed Wireless	http://www.gvec.net	25	8
Guadalupe Valley Telephone Cooperative Inc.	GVTC	Fiber	http://www.gvtc.com/	1000	250



PROVIDER	DOING BUSINESS AS	TECHNOLOGY	WEBSITE	MAX. DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAX. UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
Guadalupe Valley Telephone Cooperative Inc.	GVTC	DSL	http://www.gvtc.com/	12	1.5
HCWireless	Hill Country Wireless and Technology	Fixed Wireless	http://www.hcwireless.com/	100	25
Hillcountry Networks	Hillcountry Networks	Fixed Wireless	http://www.hillcountrytx.net	50	10
Particle Communications Inc.	Particle Communications	Fixed Wireless	N/A	25	10
Rise Broadband	Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	https://www.risebroadband.com/	50	10
Charter Communications Inc.	Spectrum	Cable	http://www.charter.com	940	35
Charter Communications Inc.	Spectrum	Fiber	http://www.charter.com	940	35
Spry Wireless Inc.	Spry Wireless Inc.	Fixed Wireless	http://www.sprywireless.com/	30	10
Texas Wireless Internet	Texas Wireless Internet	Fixed Wireless	http://www.txwinet.com	10	1
T-Mobile USA, Inc.	T-Mobile	Fixed Wireless	http://www.t-mobile.com	25	3
VTX Communications, LLC	VTX Communications	Fixed Wireless	https://www.vtx1.net/	25	3
Zeecon Wireless Internet LLC	Zeecon Wireless	Fixed Wireless	http://zeecon.com	10	1

Responsible Parties:

Simone Corprew, grant writer, County Judge Becerra, commissioners, 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](#)

[BroadbandUSA: Federal Funding Guide](#)

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

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

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



[Texas Broadband Development Office: Funding Resources](#)
[U.S. Department of the Treasury: Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds](#)
[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: Support, develop, and promote digital skills training and workforce development

Objective: Provide a countywide approach with consistent curricula to promote digital literacy throughout the region. Verify that all residents have access to the information.

Action 1 – The Hays County Technology Action Team should offer a standardized digital readiness program to residents.

Digital literacy is the ability to use information and communication technologies to find, evaluate, create, and communicate information. It requires both cognitive and technical skills.

- The [Central Texas Workforce Solution](#) already has a curriculum developed, and after a conversation with Kelly Moreno, Director of Community Engagement, this curriculum can be shared with all public libraries in the county, as well as other community organizations.
- The regional program should cover telework basics and equip participants with the skills necessary for landing a job (e.g., resume building, interview skills). This program should include digital skills, digital literacy, and a workforce development curriculum to extend to all Hays County residents.

Action 2 – Market local nonprofit and for-profit organizations that offer free digital training and workforce skills development programs to residents and businesses.

- Libraries: increase their offering of free digital learning courses, both open-source and with an instructor when possible. Current offerings include:
 - Kyle Public Library offers internet skills training through LinkedIn; a community room is also available for use.
 - Buda Public Library uses The Universal Class link and a course in Computer Literacy Level 1 – Computer Basics, at a cost of \$75.
 - San Marcos Public Library has 44 public access computers with software and free Wi-Fi and offers “Tech Help Fridays,” resume help, and assistance setting up Gmail accounts.
 - Dripping Springs Community Library uses LinkedIn Learning
- American Red Cross Texas
- Workforce Solutions of Central Texas offers a variety of curricula centered around digital literacy
- Chambers of Commerce: Kyle COC, Buda Area COC, Dripping Springs COC, San Marcos COC, Wimberly COC



- Southside Community Center
- Communities in Schools Texas of Central Texas
- AT&T Digital Literacy Training Initiative

Action 3 – Offer workshops on skills that are valued by local employers and of interest to community members.

Workshop topics to consider:

- **Introduction to Microsoft Office Suite** – Employers report that 25% of their workers are “poorly” to “fairly well” trained to match the organization’s technology needs.
 - **About:** Train employees on the basics of Microsoft Office Suite, given its ubiquitous use in companies and industries.
 - **Who:** Chambers of commerce
- **How to Teleconference** – Nearly 3 out of 4 employed survey participants (74%) telework, leaving more than 1 in 4 employees who do not.
 - **About:** What is telework, and why is it appealing for employees and employers?
 - **Who:** Chambers of commerce
- **Introduction to social media and websites** – The survey reports that 12.5% of businesses do not have a website, and a high percentage of businesses do not use various digital communications tools to interact with their community.
 - **About:** How can an online presence help businesses grow and improve productivity?
 - **Who:** chambers of commerce
- **Telehealth 101** – Access to quality health care is essential, and new technology offers greater access to health care providers via the internet.
 - **About:** Discuss terminology commonly associated with telemedicine and the benefits of virtual health care.
 - **Who:** Local hospital/medical professionals
- **Online Safety Tips and Tricks** – Residents indicated they “know a little” to “I’m comfortable with this” when referring to cybersecurity on the internet.
 - **About:** Being safe on the internet should be a priority for all. Discuss how to keep you, your family, and your information safe online.
 - **Who:** Hays County Police or Sheriff’s Department
- **Effective Online Learning and Teaching Strategies** – In Hays County, K-12 schools report 50% of classroom instruction is traditional, and 50% is web-facilitated. Blending learning techniques is key to incorporating effective teaching methods.
 - **About:** Discuss what teachers and students can do to maximize the benefits of online learning.



- **Who:** Dripping Springs ISD, Hays CISD, Ki Charter Academy, Katherine Anne Porter School, San Marcos CISD, Texas Preparatory School, Wimberley ISD

Responsible Parties:

County Judge, Technology Action Team, chambers of commerce, nonprofits, for-profits, public libraries

Timeline:

Digital literacy and workforce development programs are important in the here and now. Classes should be offered by the fall of 2022. The curriculum should be reviewed and updated every three to four months.

Resources:

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

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

[Texas Broadband Providers by County](#)

[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](#)

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

[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](#)

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

[FCC Chairwoman Rosenworcel responds to Rep. Mrvan on improving veterans' access to broadband](#)

[Orleans County Digital Literacy Initiative](#)

[Mobile Computer Labs, Classrooms Bring STEM to rural Schools](#)

Goal 3: Increase free Wi-Fi services in public areas and provide resources for low-cost broadband options

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

In Hays County, 5.5% of survey participants do not have an internet connection, and of those households, 18.5% indicate that they do not have internet because it is too expensive. Of those who do have a connection, 55% are dissatisfied with their service. Diving deeper into the statistics, 67% of



those dissatisfied with service say cost is a factor. Other reasons for dissatisfaction are having an unreliable connection and slow speeds. With an aggressive strategic plan to connect its residents to reliable and affordable broadband, Hays County can lead the region in economic growth and educational opportunities.

Action 1 – Promote programs that help residents overcome the affordability barrier to broadband adoption.

Hays County should work 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 the water bill, 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:

- **A resource to locate affordable internet service or computers:** Using online resources, Hays 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 Hays 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 25 Mbps. Spectrum (Charter) offers *Spectrum Internet Assist* for about \$20 a month for up to 30 Mbps. *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 for broadband to eligible households:
 - **Lifeline Program:** This is a federal assistance program administered 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.
 - **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 tablet. A complete list of Texas providers offering ACP discounts can be found [here](#). For a full list of providers listed by city, state, or ZIP code that offer this service, please click [here](#).



Action 2 – Make public Wi-Fi locations available throughout Hays County.

The 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 working with the community anchor institutions, such as public libraries, to identify the number of Wi-Fi hotspots on available public computers. Additionally, compiling community hotspot availability in public places, such as parks and other recreational centers, and developing plans to create hotspots in areas where people attend recreational activities, such as tourist attractions, can significantly expand public access.

Action 3 – Educate community anchor institutions such as libraries, community centers, and senior centers that host public computing centers, on their important 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, chambers of commerce, churches, and community service providers.

Timeline:

An inventory of library broadband offerings and free community public broadband 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 qualifying households

[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](#)

[Benefits to small businesses offering 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](#)

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



Goal 4: Bring higher broadband speeds to areas surrounding Texas State University

Objective: Address the disparity in services around Texas State University (TSU), which is important to the county and the university to attract future students.

CNTX conducted a high-level broadband outside plant audit between June 5 and 12 to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure across Hays County. The assessment was designed to identify infrastructure that existed across the county to determine how to fill in the missing gaps.

Of interest, CNTX found that the campus of TSU had fiber to the premise (FTTP), while students who live off-campus had hybrid fiber-coaxial cable (HFC). The difference can be quite dramatic in speed, especially in high-traffic times of day.

Action 1 – Develop a dialogue with property owners and ISPs.

Bring property owners and providers together to discuss the speed and technology needs of students and residents in housing close to campus.

Local providers serving the area surrounding the TSU campus include:

- Astound (Grande Communications) – cable – 600/35 Mbps
- CenturyLink – DSL – 80/10 Mbps
- Particle Communications – fixed wireless – 25/10
- Spectrum – cable – 940/35
- Spry Wireless – fixed wireless – 30/10 Mbps
- Texas Wireless Internet – fixed wireless – 10/1
- VTX Communications – fixed wireless – 25/3 Mbps

*This may not be an all-inclusive list.

Although Astound only offers speeds of 600/35 Mbps to households near TSU campus, CNTX verified that it offers much faster fiber internet service, at speeds up to 1000/1000 Mbps, to households on campus. Additionally, fiber markers indicate the presence of several other providers near campus.

Action 2 – Property owners should promote available internet service, types of technology, and speeds at their locations to students prior to leases being signed.

This will allow students to choose the best-connected locations for their studies. Disclosure of this information can help develop and further strengthen relationships between property owners and internet providers.

Timeline:

Informing students of internet coverage available at their off-campus living should be ongoing. Speaking with local providers about current internet offerings should begin immediately.



Resources:

[1 in 4 college students' unreliable internet makes coursework difficult](#)
[Closing the Digital Divide in 2022](#)