

# DONLEY & WHEELER COUNTIES, TEXAS

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Broadband Plan Summary

October 2021



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# OVERVIEW *01*

**OVERVIEW**

Today, technology plays a pivotal role in how businesses operate, how institutions provide services, and where consumers choose to live, work, and play. The success of a community depends on how broadly and deeply the community adopts technology resources, which includes access to reliable, high-speed networks; the digital literacy of residents; and the use of online resources locally for business, government, and leisure.

The Connected Nation Texas (CN Texas) Connected Program partnered with the Donley County and Wheeler County Broadband Teams to conduct a study designed to determine the availability of broadband infrastructure; how residents are adopting and using broadband services; and what steps would help improve broadband access, adoption, and use across local community sectors.

Pursuant of this goal, between August 2020 and May 2021, Donley and Wheeler Counties conducted a comprehensive survey of broadband technology access and adoption across nine community sectors. In total, the survey yielded responses from 137 households in Donley County and 218 households in Wheeler County. Overall, the assessment was designed to identify issues and opportunities to close the local Digital Divide.

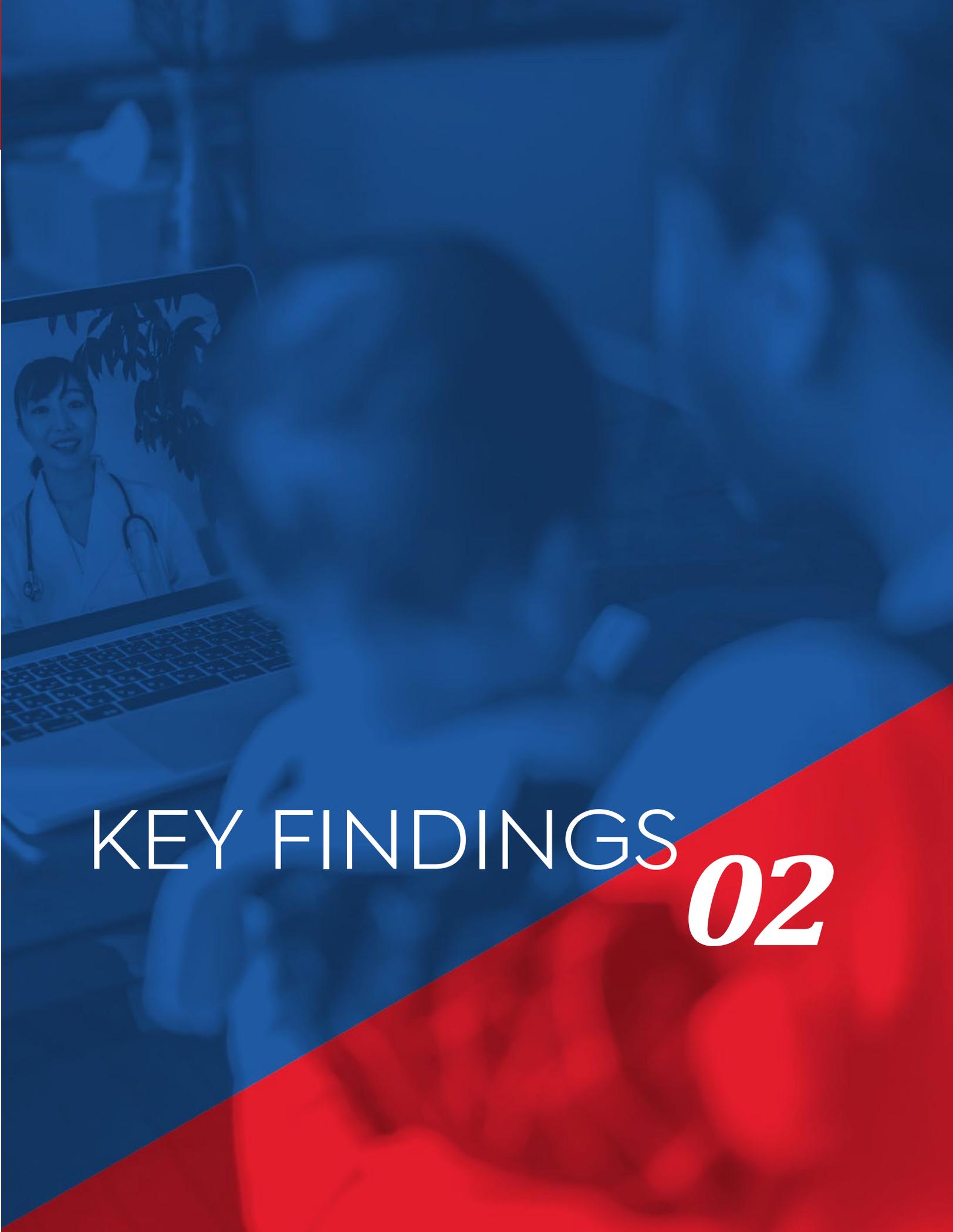
Both Donley and Wheeler Counties are in a good position to improve broadband access, adoption, and use throughout the community. With Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF) money (once approved) and Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds flowing into the counties, the future looks bright. Understanding how to partner with local providers and keeping up with grant expenditures is imperative to long-term success. Many recommendations in this action plan are inexpensive or cost nothing at all but will contribute greatly to community development.

The following provides a summary of the community broadband assessment as well as recommendations for improving broadband access, adoption, and use. The community action plan brings specific attention to broadband expansion, specifically through community adoption and infrastructure advancements. This action plan considers federal allocations and the need for centralized broadband leadership. To highlight key findings CN Texas created an interactive map for these communities. To access the map, click [HERE](#).

Donley & Wheeler Counties – Quick Facts		
	Donley	Wheeler
Population	3,258	4,990
Number of Households	1,335	2,598
Median Household Income	\$42,961	\$49,315
Poverty Rate	14.7%	18.3%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	17.9%	16.8%
Homeownership Rate	70.3%	66.6%
Hispanic or Latino Population	10.9%	24.6%
Households Served with Broadband <sup>1</sup>	91.32%	94.77%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (2019 5-year estimate) and 2020 Decennial census  
 Donley County: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48129>.  
 Wheeler County: <https://data.census.gov/cedsci/profile?g=0500000US48483>.

<sup>1</sup> The current FCC definition of broadband is a minimum of 25 Mbps download and 3 Mbps upload. This data is derived from Connected Nation Texas, July 2021. [https://connectednation.org/texas/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2021/07/TX\\_Broadband\\_Availability\\_SpeedTier\\_Counties\\_2021\\_07\\_31.pdf](https://connectednation.org/texas/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2021/07/TX_Broadband_Availability_SpeedTier_Counties_2021_07_31.pdf).



# KEY FINDINGS

*02*

## KEY FINDINGS – DONLEY COUNTY

- Only **42.38%** of households in Donley County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream).
- About **28%** of households either use non-fixed internet connections<sup>2</sup> such as dial-up, satellite, and mobile-only services or are not adopting broadband at all.
- For households that said they do not subscribe to home internet service, the **top barrier was the cost of internet service**, followed by **a lack of available service**.
- **33%** of businesses either use non-fixed internet connections such as dial-up, satellite, and mobile-only services, or are not adopting broadband at all.
- Among businesses who cannot or do not subscribe to broadband, **100%** said **cost** was the leading barrier to adoption.
- **57%** of households reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds and unreliable connections.
- **84.5%** of households said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.
- The average internet speed reported by households in Donley County (**11.83 Mbps**) is significantly lower than connections in other Connected communities (33.8 Mbps) surveyed.



**\$76.45**

**Average  
monthly cost  
of internet  
service in  
Donley County**

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<sup>2</sup> Non-fixed internet connections include dial-up, satellite, and mobile-only services. These non-fixed types of internet services, while providing basic access, can often be plagued by connection latency, have costly monthly data plans, or can be impacted by weather, terrain, large expanses of open water, and other environmental factors.

## KEY FINDINGS – WHEELER COUNTY

- Only **36.5%** of households in Wheeler County have access to internet service at speeds needed to run many modern applications (100 Mbps downstream and 10 Mbps upstream). Statewide, 92% of households have internet access at this speed.
- Over **one-quarter** of households (26%) either use non-fixed internet connections<sup>3</sup> such as dial-up, satellite, and mobile-only services or are not adopting broadband at all.
- For households that said they do not subscribe to home internet service, the **top barrier was the lack of available internet service, followed by the monthly cost of service.**
- **24% of businesses** either use non-fixed internet connections such as dial-up, satellite, and mobile-only services or are not adopting broadband at all.
- **75% of businesses** who do not or cannot subscribe to broadband stated that cost was their primary barrier to broadband adoption.
- **47%** of households reported that they were dissatisfied with their current internet service. The top reasons for dissatisfaction were slow speeds and unreliable connections.
- **91.1%** of households said they would like to have improved or additional options for home internet service.
- Over **two-thirds** of households in Wheeler County have a mobile broadband. Having both fixed and mobile broadband connections is critical for households to ensure voice and data options are available to users as needed or desired.



**\$77.56**

Average monthly  
cost of internet  
service reported  
in Wheeler  
County

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<sup>3</sup> Non-fixed internet connections include dial-up, satellite, and mobile-only services. These non-fixed types of internet services, while providing basic access, can often be plagued by connection latency, have costly monthly data plans, or can be impacted by weather, terrain, large expanses of open water, and other environmental factors.



INFRASTRUCTURE

***03***

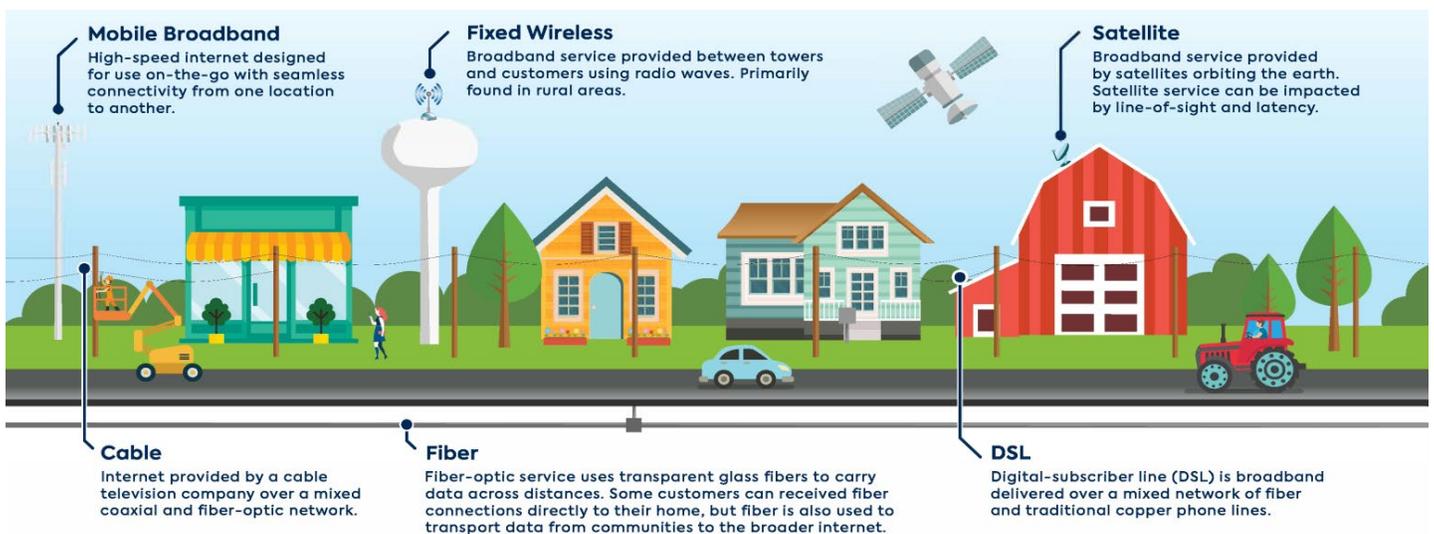
**INFRASTRUCTURE**

Broadband access refers to the infrastructure that enables a high-speed internet connection. There are two primary types of broadband connections: fixed and mobile. Fixed broadband is delivered to a user via several technology platforms including cable, digital subscriber line (DSL) over phone line, fiber optics, and fixed wireless. Fixed broadband is designed for stationary use at a fixed location such as a home, business, or intuition. With a location, however, fixed broadband service is often broadcast as a Wi-Fi network to connect nearby devices.

The first step in understanding the state of broadband infrastructure in Donley and Wheeler Counties – and the rest of Texas – is having accurate maps. Accordingly, CN Texas works with providers to develop a variety of broadband maps at a state and county level. Data shown on these maps is 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 were 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, a format that tends to overstate the service territory. The broadband maps are then developed with additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input.

Broadband – Quick Facts		
	Donley	Wheeler
Unserved Households (25/3 Mbps)	132	114
Households served (10/1 Mbps)	100.00%	98.76%
Households served (25/3 Mbps)	91.32%	94.77%
Households served (50/5 Mbps)	60.84%	58.27%
Households served (100/10 Mbps)	42.38%	36.52%

Broadband data collected by CN Texas in 2021  
<https://connectednation.org/texas/mapping-analysis/>.

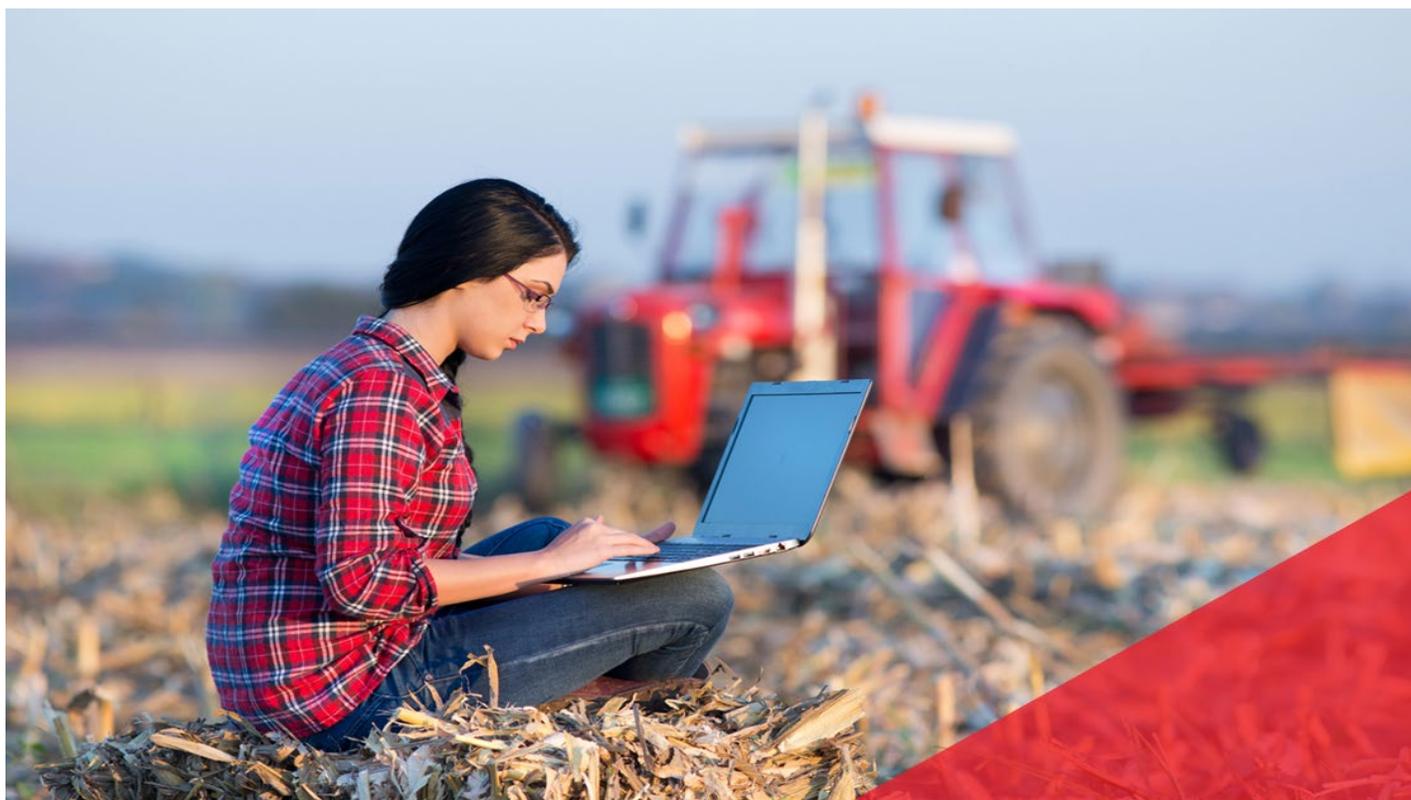


**INFRASTRUCTURE - DONLEY COUNTY**

Below is the list of internet service providers in Donley County. There were seven providers as shown on the table below:

**Internet Service Providers in Donley County**

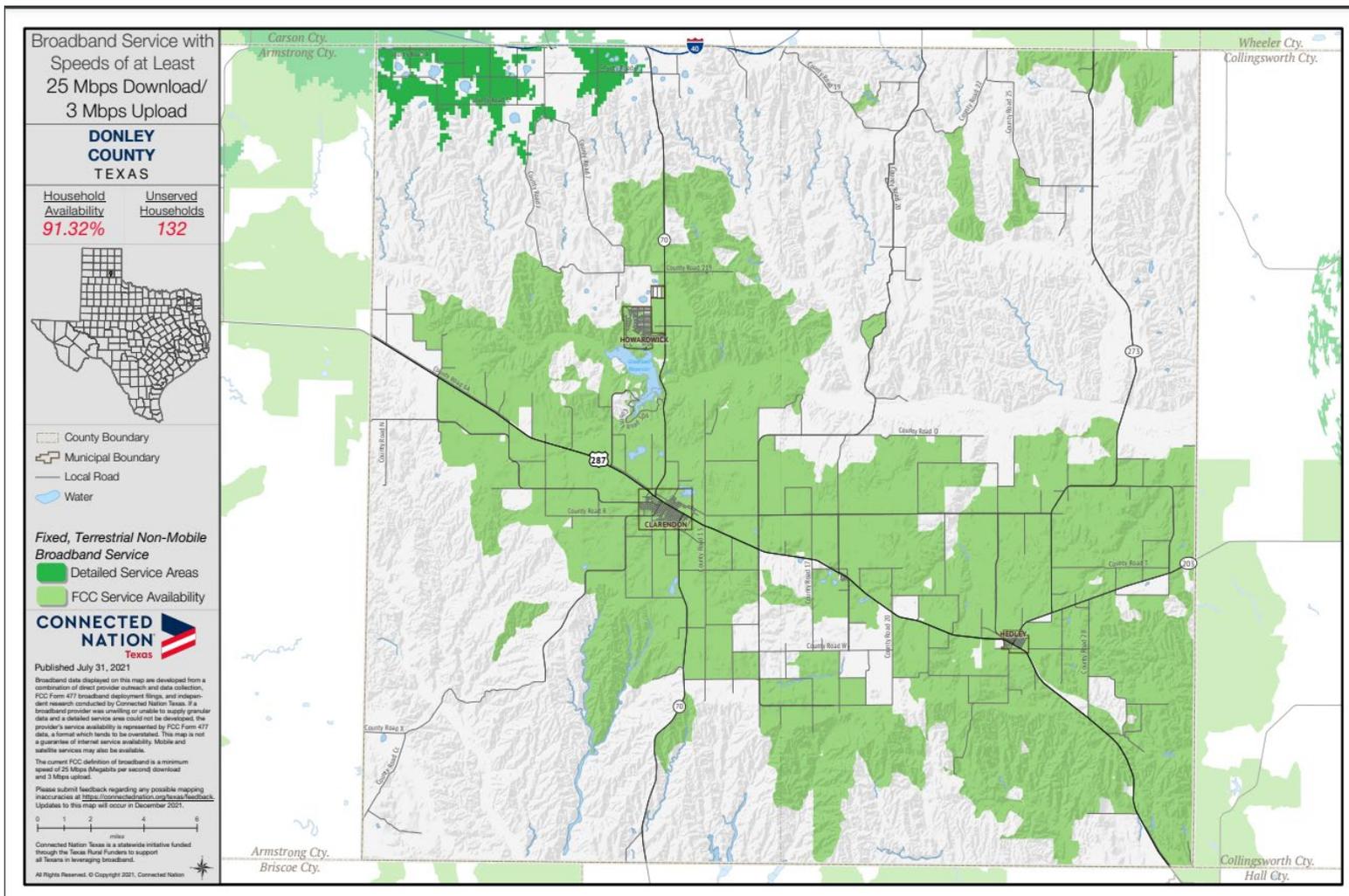
<b>PROVIDER</b>	<b>TECHNOLOGY</b>	<b>MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)</b>	<b>MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)</b>
AMA TechTel Communications	Fixed Wireless	25	3
Mid-Plains Communications	Fiber	200	100
Plains Internet	Fixed Wireless	25	3
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	25	5
Suddenlink Communications	Cable	15	2
TRANSWORLD NETWORK CORP	Fixed Wireless	15	5
Valor Telecommunications of Texas LP	DSL	200	200
	Fiber	200	200



# DONLEY & WHEELER COUNTIES, TEXAS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Below is Donley County's (25/3 Mbps) map. Access the full map by selecting Donley County from the list found [here](#). Other portions of the county are served by internet service providers (ISPs) offering slower advertised speeds.

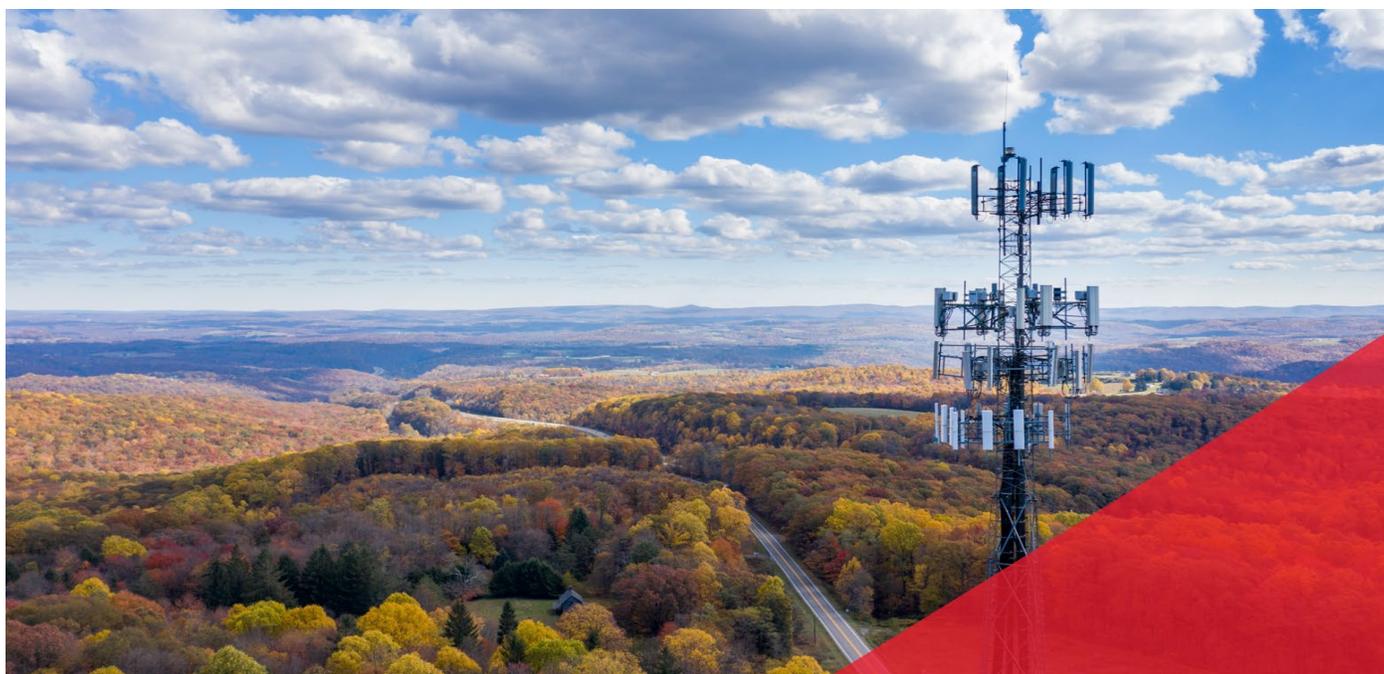


**INFRASTRUCTURE – WHEELER COUNTY**

According to CN Texas broadband data collected in July 2021 – with additional public feedback, field validation, and provider input, more than nine out of ten (94.77%) Wheeler County households have access to broadband at least 25/3 Mbps, the current definition of broadband as set forth by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). There were seven providers as shown on the table below:

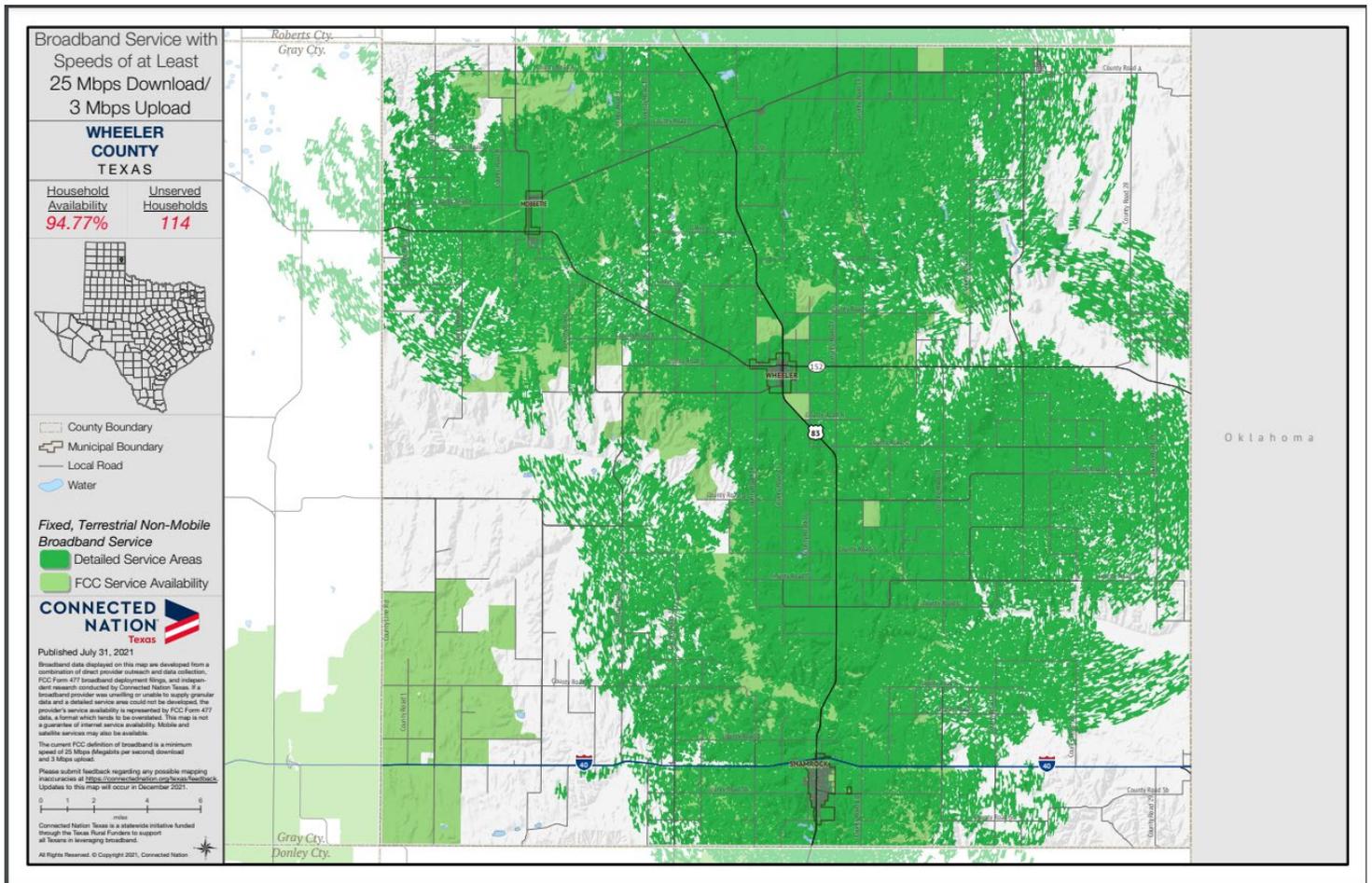
**Internet Service Providers in Wheeler County**

PROVIDER	TECHNOLOGY	MAXIMUM DOWNLOAD SPEED (Mbps)	MAXIMUM UPLOAD SPEED (Mbps)
AMA TechTel Communications	Fixed Wireless	50	3
Resound Networks	Fixed Wireless	100	50
Rise Broadband	Fixed Wireless	25	5
Valor Telecommunications of Texas LP	DSL	200	200
TRANSWORLD NETWORK CORP	Fixed Wireless	15	5
Mid-Plains Communications	Fiber	200	100
AT&T Southwest	DSL	18	1
	Fixed Wireless	10	1



# DONLEY & WHEELER COUNTIES, TEXAS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Below is Wheeler County's (25/3 Mbps) map. Access the full map by selecting Wheeler County from the list found [here](#). Other portions of the county are served by internet service providers (ISPs) offering slower advertised speeds.





HOUSEHOLDS:  
DETAILED FINDINGS

*04*

**HOUSEHOLDS: DETAILED FINDINGS – DONLEY COUNTY**

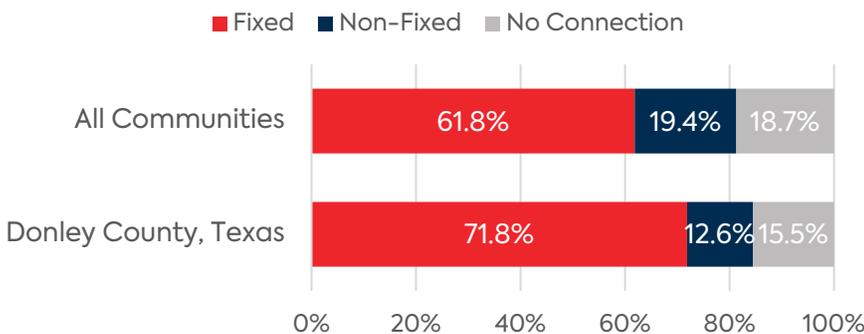
The following provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Donley County between August 2020 and May 2021. Altogether, CN Texas received 137 completed surveys from households across the county and respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity, or lack thereof. Data from Donley County are compared to data from dozens of other rural Connected participating communities across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

Donley Households – Quick Facts	
Fixed Home Broadband Adoption <sup>4</sup>	71.8%
Average Monthly Cost of Internet	\$76.45
Average Download Speed	11.83 Mbps
Households Satisfied with Service	43.0%

Source: Donley County Household Survey conducted by CN Texas

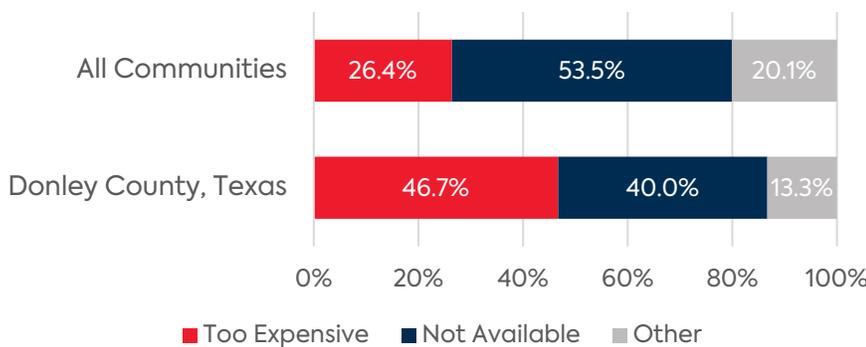
**ADOPTION**

**Home Broadband Adoption**



In Donley County, 71.8% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology. Just 12.6% of respondents indicate they have internet service, but it is delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves 15.5% of households without internet access at home.

**Primary Barrier to Home Broadband Adoption**

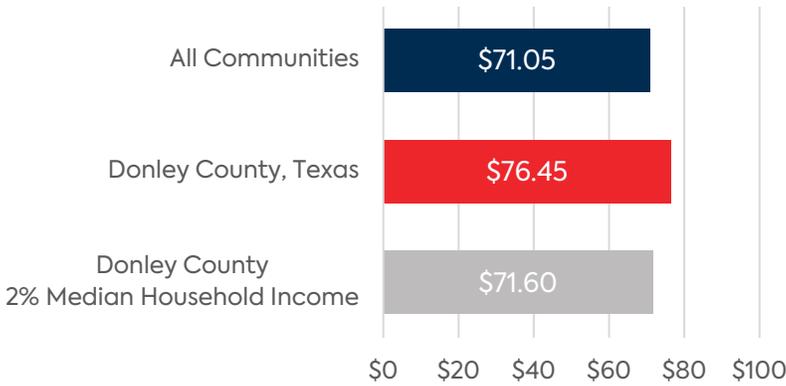


Among those without a home internet connection, 40% said they did not have broadband because it was not available to them, while 46.7% indicate that it was too expensive. Like in many communities, cost and availability are the two primary barriers to home broadband adoption.

<sup>4</sup> Fixed home broadband connections are those provided by cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology.

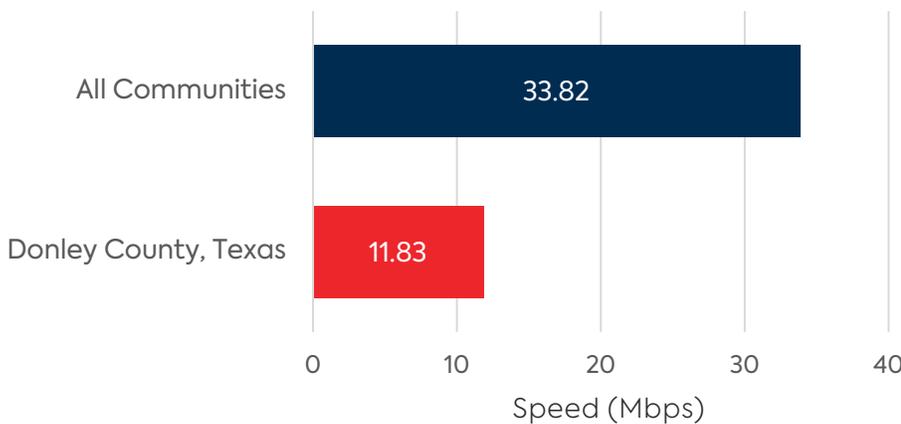
## CONNECTION DETAILS

### Average Monthly Cost for Home Internet Service



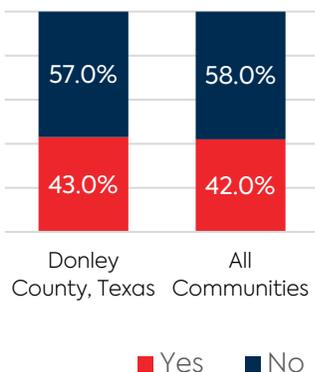
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that, on average, their internet connection costs \$76.45 per month. This is \$5.40 higher than monthly costs in other communities. Two percent of the median household income in Donley County is \$71.60 per month.

### Average Download Speed (Mbps)

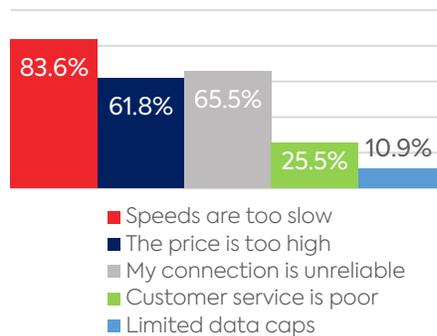


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 11.83 Mbps, which is about one-third of the speed of household connections in other communities and less than one-half the defined speed of broadband, which is 25 Mbps downstream.

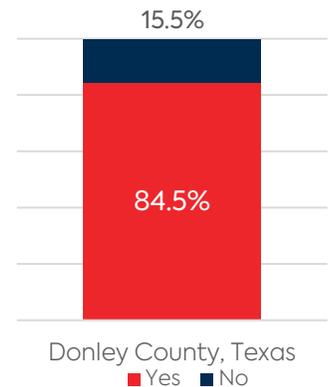
### Does Your Internet Connection Meet Your Needs?



### Why Does Your Connection Not Meet Your Needs?



### Are You Interested in Additional Internet Choices at Home?



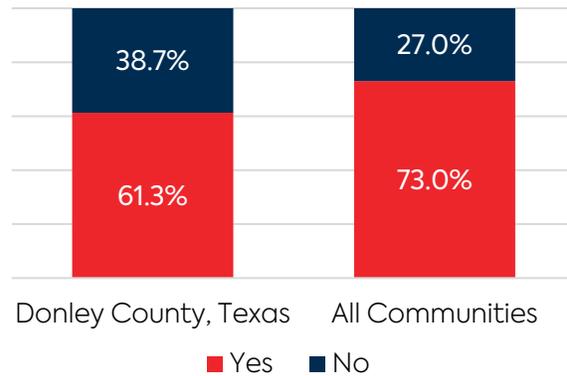
Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Over one-half of respondents (57%) indicate that their internet connection does not meet their needs. This is a similar rate of dissatisfaction to households in other communities. When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 83.6% of households indicate that the speed is too slow. Almost two-thirds say the price is too high (61.8%), while 65.5% indicate that the connection is unreliable (respondents could choose more than one reason). Finally, 84.5% indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

**MOBILE CONNECTIVITY**

More than three out of five Donley County households report that they subscribe to mobile internet service which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is over ten percentage points less than reported in other Connected communities.

Additionally, 11.6% of mobile-connected households report that they rely on their mobile connection as their primary source of internet connectivity at home, and 14.5% use mobile service to connect other household devices to the internet.

**Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service**

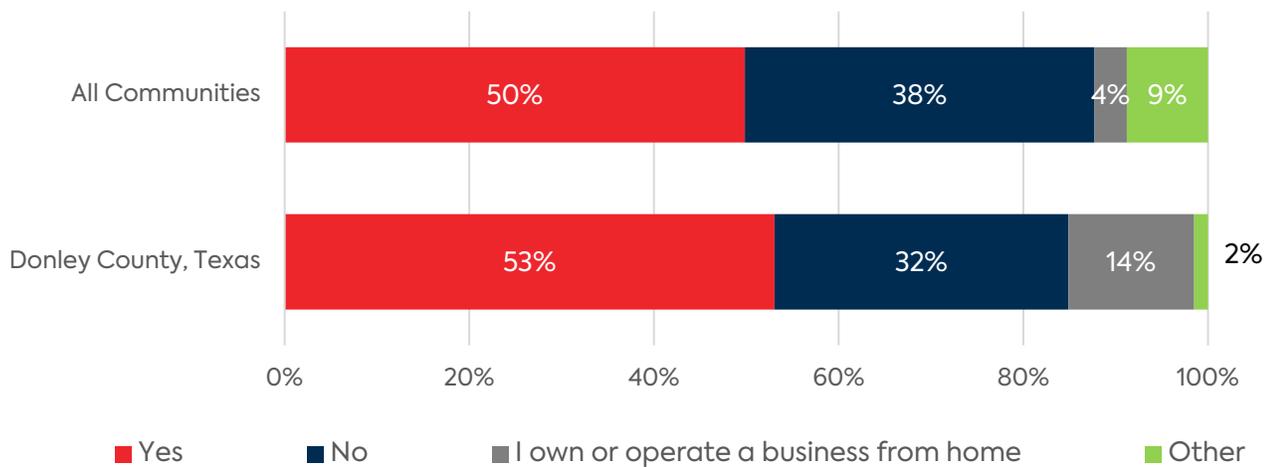


**11.6%** of households that subscribe to mobile internet service use that mobile connection as their primary home internet source.

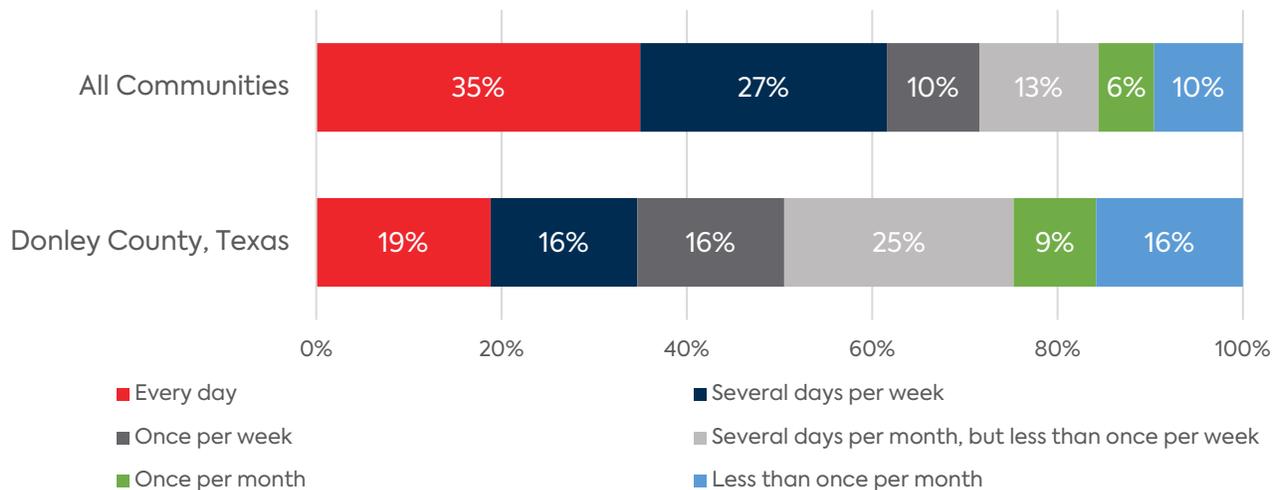
**TELEWORK**

Teleworking, or telecommuting, refers to working outside of the conventional workplace and communicating with it by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology. Teleworkers often do not register on typical measures of economic or workforce activity. Economic development strategies traditionally involve the attraction or retention of employers. The COVID-19 lockdowns helped to accelerate adoption of teleworking temporarily, and in some instances for the long-run. However, this only works if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure. Approximately 53% of employed residents in Donley County indicate that they telework at least part of the time. This is more than residents in other communities. It is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic likely had a dramatic impact on the teleworking data.

**Do You Currently Telework for Your Job?**



**How Frequently Do You Telework?**



**HOUSEHOLDS: DETAILED FINDINGS – WHEELER COUNTY**

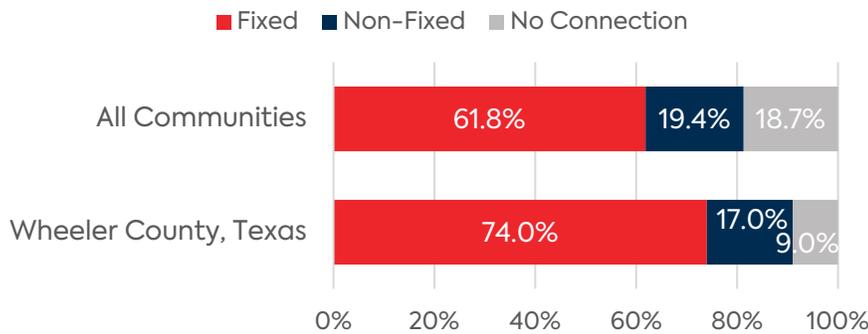
The following provides an overview of results from a broadband survey conducted in Wheeler County between August 2020 and May 2021. Altogether, CN Texas received 218 completed surveys from households across the county, and respondents provided insights into their internet connectivity or lack thereof. Data from Wheeler County are compared to data from dozens of other rural Connected participating communities across Michigan, Ohio, Texas, and Pennsylvania to benchmark and identify areas for improvement.

Wheeler Households – Quick Facts	
Fixed Home Broadband Adoption	74%
Average Monthly Cost of Internet	\$77.56
Average Download Speed	11.45 Mbps
Households Satisfied with Service	53.0 %

Source: Wheeler County Household Survey conducted by CN Texas

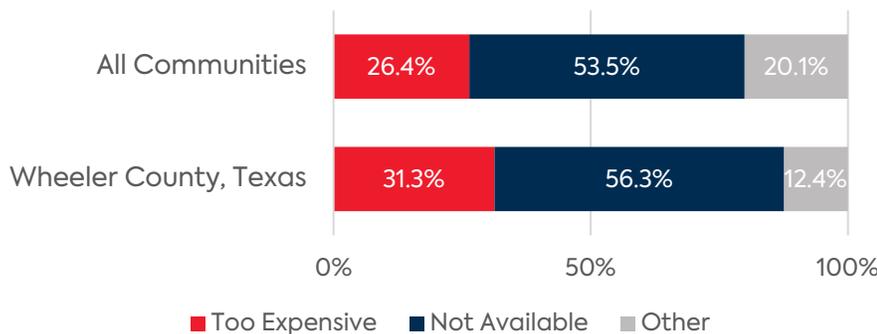
**ADOPTION**

**Home Broadband Adoption**



In Wheeler County, 74% of households that took the survey subscribe to fixed broadband service delivered via a cable, DSL, fiber, or fixed wireless technology. More than one in six respondents (17%) of indicated that they have internet service, but it is delivered via dial-up, satellite, or a mobile wireless service. This leaves just 9% of households without internet access at home.

**Primary Barrier to Home Broadband Adoption**



Among those without a home internet connection, 56.3% said they did not have broadband because it was not available to them, while nearly 31.3% indicate that it was too expensive. Like in Donley County and many other communities, cost and availability are the two primary barriers to home broadband adoption in Wheeler County.

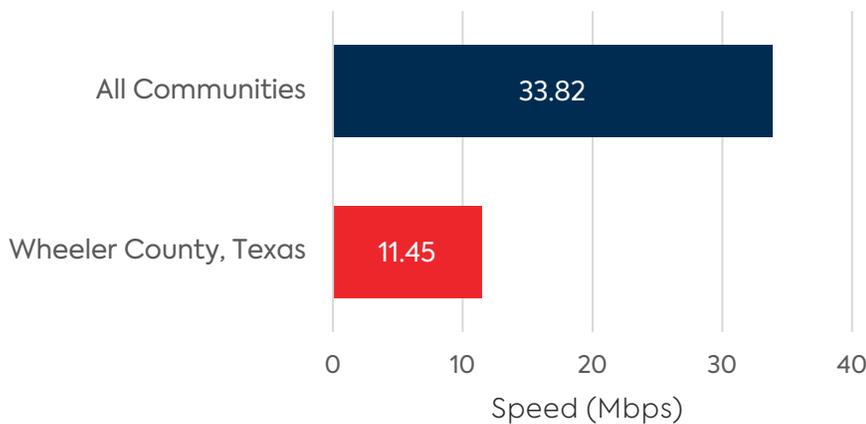
CONNECTION DETAILS

**Average Monthly Cost for Home Internet Service**



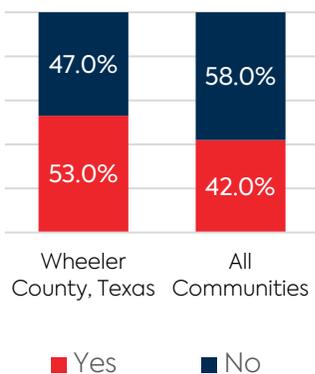
Two percent of monthly income is a recognized standard for measuring the affordability of a home internet connection. Respondents indicate that on average, their internet connection costs \$77.56 per month. This is over \$5 more than in other communities. Two percent of the median household income in Wheeler County is \$82.19 per month.

**Average Download Speed (Mbps)**

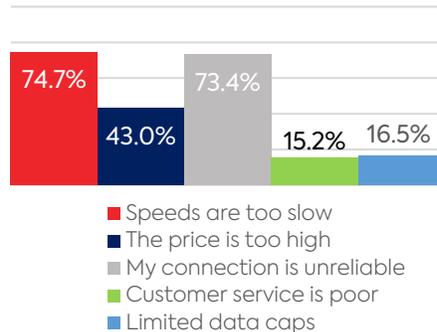


The FCC currently defines broadband as an internet connection with a download speed of at least 25 Mbps and upload speed of at least 3 Mbps. On average, respondents indicate that their connection's download speed is 11.45 Mbps, which is slightly more than one-third the speed of household connections in other communities and less than one-half the speed of broadband, which is 25 Mbps downstream.

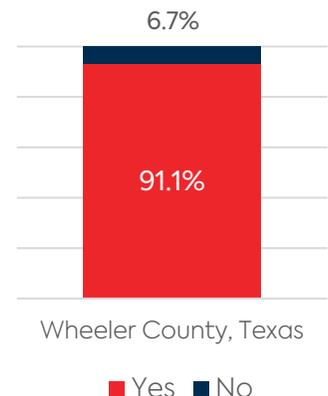
**Does Your Internet Connection Meet Your Needs?**



**Why Does Your Connection Not Meet Your Needs?**



**Are You Interested in Additional Internet Choices at Home?**



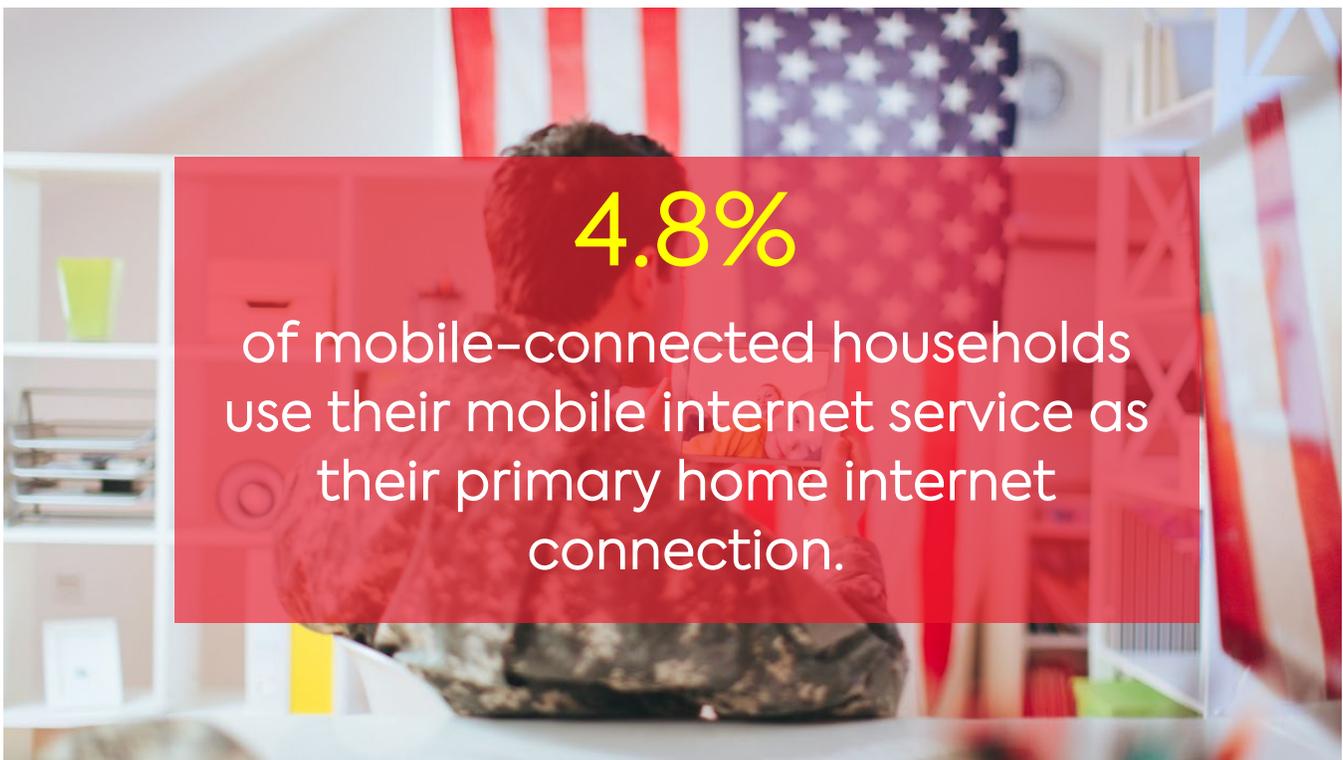
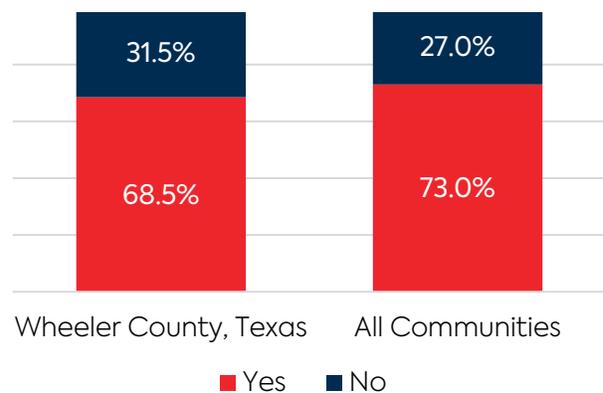
Competition provides residents with choices for service, allowing households the ability to switch providers if their current service does not meet their needs. Nearly one-half of respondents (47%) indicate that their internet connection does not meet their needs. This is a lower rate of dissatisfaction to households in other communities. When asked why their connection does not meet their needs, 74.7% of households indicate that the speed is too slow; 73.4% indicate that the connection is unreliable; and 43% say the price is too high (respondents could choose more than one reason). Finally, more than nine out of ten respondents (91.1%) indicate that they are interested in additional internet choices for their home.

**MOBILE CONNECTIVITY**

More than two-thirds of Wheeler County households (68.5%) report that they subscribe to mobile internet service which they access via a smartphone or similar mobile device. This is slightly less than reported in other Connected communities.

Additionally, 4.8% of these mobile-connected households report that they rely on their mobile service as their primary source of internet connectivity at home, while 13.7% use mobile service to connect other household devices to the internet.

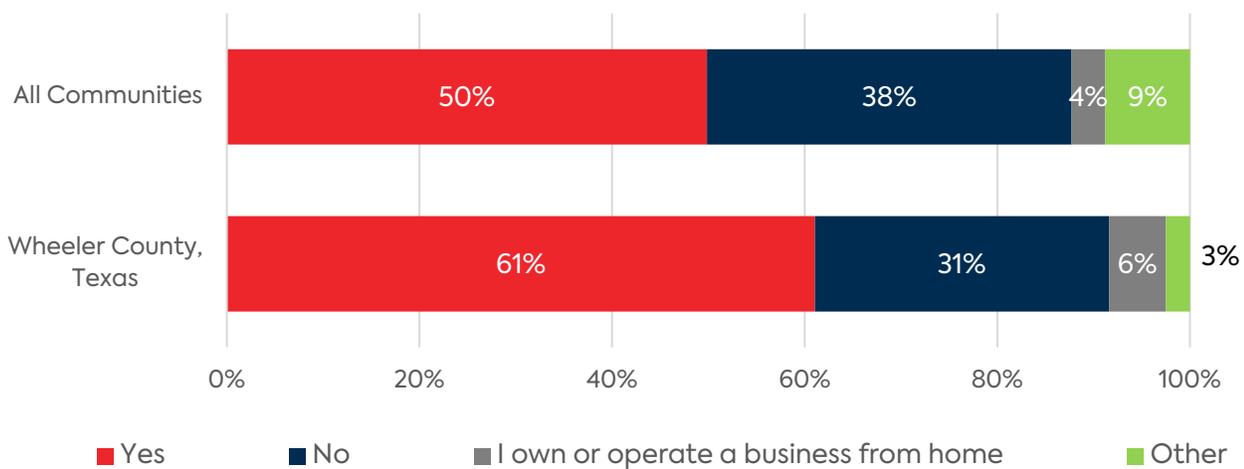
**Households Subscribing to Mobile Internet Service**



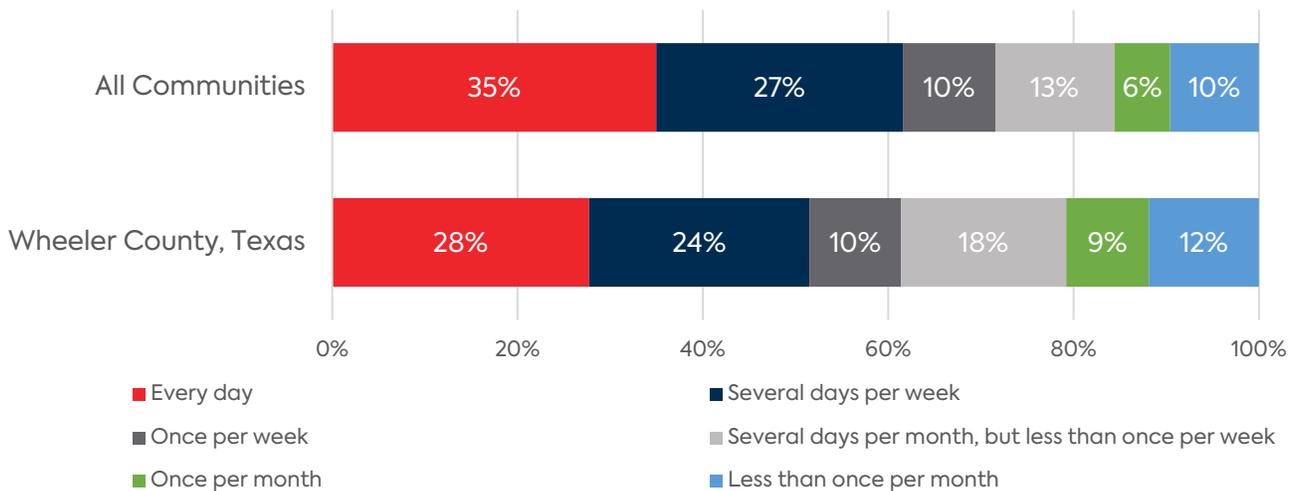
**TELEWORK**

Teleworking, or telecommuting, refers to working outside of the conventional workplace and communicating with it by way of telecommunications or computer-based technology. Teleworkers often do not register on typical measures of economic or workforce activity. Economic development strategies traditionally involve the attraction or retention of employers. While this is a critical part of growing a local economy, telework represents an opportunity to attract or retain employees even though their employer may not be located within the community, but only if those employees have access to advanced broadband infrastructure. Approximately 61% of employed residents in Wheeler County indicate that they telework at least part of the time. This is more than residents in other communities.

**Do You Currently Telework for Your Job?**



**How Frequently Do You Telework?**





RECOMMENDED  
ACTIONS

***05***

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are presented to assist Donley and Wheeler Counties in expanding broadband access and adoption throughout the community.

### Goal 1: Identify a single point of contact to organize and lead broadband initiatives in Donley and Wheeler Counties.

To ensure the success of the community action plan and to equip Donley and Wheeler Counties with the necessary tools for broadband growth, the communities will centralize broadband expansion and improvement efforts in a single entity: a broadband liaison. Ideally this broadband liaison will 1) promote broadband and technology access, adoption, and use; 2) serve as the go-to resource for broadband and technology needs; 3) seek ways to educate and empower the community regarding broadband and related technology; 4) take priority action on recommendations from the community action plan and implement other programs that are necessary and beneficial to the growth of the community; 5) monitor federal grant applications and expenditures. Donley and Wheeler Counties should each appoint a broadband liaison. The Commissioners Court in each County will need to independently appoint a specific individual as liaison to ensure he/she has full power to act on behalf of each county on matters pertaining to broadband, funding, and community partnerships. Donley and Wheeler Counties, while similar, have unique broadband needs that highlight the importance of a county-specific broadband liaison.

Should Donley and Wheeler Counties be unable to appoint individual broadband liaisons, the communities should pursue appointment of a joint staffer to serve in this capacity. Community-specific leadership is the primary goal with dual-county partnership serving as an alternative.

Ultimately, it should be noted that both Donley and Wheeler Counties will find it very difficult to achieve broadband advancement and implement the goals set forth in this action plan without first identifying community leadership. Without a broadband liaison to serve as the tactical lead on broadband projects, both Donley and Wheeler Counties will struggle with organization and a clear infrastructure development plan.

**Objective:** Designate a local leader to oversee broadband improvement projects, grant applications, and community relations with internet service providers in Donley and Wheeler Counties.

#### **Actions:**

**Action 1 –** The Commissioners Court in Donley County and Wheeler County should appoint broadband liaisons—one for each community. The broadband liaison will serve each county on broadband matters. The liaison should be knowledgeable on broadband, understand the demographics of Donley or Wheeler County, and be prepared to work collaboratively with community organizations. The liaison should receive appointment, or approval, from the Commissioners Court. It is important for the local government to take ownership in this appointment as the liaison will be the leading voice and decision-maker on broadband matters.

**Officials who should appoint the broadband liaison:**

**Donley County:**

Judge John C. Howard

Commissioners Mark White, Daniel Ford, Neil Koetting, and Dan Sawyer

**Wheeler County:**

Judge Carol Porton

Commissioners Jackie Don May Jr, Robert Hink, David Simpson, and John Walker

**Action 2** – Community leaders should identify an agreed-upon list of duties for which the broadband liaison will be responsible in his/her official capacity. The liaison should establish an office in the Economic Development Corporation (EDC). The EDC already conducts critical work in each community, connecting residents to vital resources and promoting economic opportunities.

Responsibilities of the broadband liaison could include:

- Serve as the go-to resource for broadband information within the immediate community
- Educate county leaders and residents on broadband programs, opportunities, and benefits
- Monitor grant expenditures within county; report concerns to Commissioners Court
- Stay up to date on current broadband grant programs at the state and federal level and apply to programs as they become available (see the Internet Society and Connected Nation references below)
- Work with community organizations and internet service providers on broadband initiatives

**Action 3**– The broadband liaison should identify county stakeholders and representatives from regional organizations and broadband providers who can augment his/her work as the central authority on broadband. These partnerships should be used to further the community’s broadband agenda and ensure this action plan is adopted in a timely fashion.

**Community stakeholders and regional organizations:**

- The High Ground of Texas
- Panhandle Regional Planning Commission
- EDCs: Clarendon EDC, Wheeler County EDC, Shamrock EDC
- Chambers of Commerce: Clarendon, Donley, Shamrock
- Donley Emergency Management
- Clarendon College
- Other “Connected” communities in the Panhandle Region: Hall County, others to come
- Internet Service Providers

**Action 3** – The liaisons from Donley and Wheeler Counties should meet at least once a month to discuss ongoing broadband projects in each community. It is paramount that Donley and Wheeler Counties recognize the value of partnership in the broadband sphere. Broadband expansion and improvement projects can be expensive, time-consuming, and competitive, making a dual-county partnership valuable for all parties. Not

only will the partnership be marketable to broadband providers, but it will bolster general broadband opportunities.

**Responsible Parties:**

Local units of government; Broadband providers; Community and regional organizations

**Timeline:**

Donley and Wheeler County officials should convene within six weeks of this action plan to discuss appointment of a broadband liaison for each county. The liaisons should be appointed within 14 weeks of this plan.

**Resources:**

- Texas Broadband Providers by County <https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/>
- Wheeler EDC: <https://www.wheelertexas.org/economic-development>
- Clarendon EDC <https://www.clarendontx.com/cedc>
- Current Broadband Funding <https://connectednation.org/current-broadband-funding>

**Goal 2: Catalog ongoing and planned broadband improvement projects and federal funding initiatives.**

In partnership with the Connected Program, Donley and Wheeler Counties collected surveys from residents, business owners, government officials, and other community stakeholders over the course of multiple months. These surveys collected data about the internet needs and wants of residents and evaluated rates of broadband access, adoption, and use among key community sectors. Results of the survey in both counties indicate a need for affordable high-speed internet that supports telework and general community communications. Fifty-three percent of employed Donley County respondents indicate they telework, with another 13% indicating they own or operate a business from home. In Wheeler County, 61% of employed respondents indicate they telework, with an additional 6% indicating they own or operate a business from their home. In both communities, the leading reasons for dissatisfaction with internet service were slow speeds and unreliable connections. The preceding survey results indicate residents in both communities have a strong desire and need to be digitally engaged, but currently have barriers. Without the proper broadband infrastructure, Donley and Wheeler Counties will be unable to support the digital needs and wants of residents now and in the future. Through improvement projects and strategic partnerships, Donley and Wheeler Counties can bring affordable and reliable broadband to residents.

**Objective:**

Increase broadband access, adoption, and use in Donley and Wheeler Counties through broadband improvement projects and strategic community partnerships.

**Actions:**

**Action 1** – To effectively understand the current broadband funding landscape in Donley and Wheeler Counties, the broadband liaisons should meet with internet service providers (ISPs) who have already been allocated federal money, including recipients of funding through the Rural Digital Opportunity Fund (RDOF). Additionally, the liaisons should meet with local ISPs to assess the status of ongoing or upcoming infrastructure improvement and expansion projects. As Donley and Wheeler Counties consider expanding and improving broadband infrastructure, the goal should be to pursue strategic projects that are not needlessly redundant (i.e., expand access where RDOF winners are already working).

**RDOF**

**Donley:**

Resound Networks – 867 location – \$2,724,120.00

**Wheeler:**

Resound Networks – 169 locations – \$575,116.60

**Action 1a\*** – If Donley County is interested in pursuing conversation with Guggenheim Partners, the broadband liaison should set up a meeting with the company’s representative, Taylor Harrington. Guggenheim Partners is a global investment and advisory financial services firm. More information is available on their website; see the link in the below references. Guggenheim Partners expressed interest in learning more about Donley County in May and offered to discuss further details via a Zoom meeting.

Please contact your Broadband Solutions Manager at CN Texas for specific information to contact Guggenheim Partners.

**Action 2** – During meetings with providers, the broadband liaisons should discuss the role the counties- or a city- could play through financial backing or strategic partnerships to speed up project completion, ensure project completion, or start a new project altogether. Ultimately, Donley and Wheeler Counties should play a strategic role in ongoing or planned projects that will widely benefit the most residents.

Donley County has been allocated \$636,713.00 in Coronavirus State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, and Wheeler County has been allocated \$982,069.00. While neither county must make any decisions about spending these funds until the Treasury Department issues final rules, it is important for the communities, through the broadband liaisons, to begin building relationships with local providers in preparation for passage of those final rules.

**Action 3**- After taking stock of broadband initiatives in each county, the broadband liaisons should identify applicable grants to expand broadband access, adoption, and use. Grants may provide funding for broadband infrastructure or digital literacy and digital skills expansion. Current grant openings can be found on the Connected Nation and BroadbandUSA websites. Links can be found in the resources section.

**Responsible Parties:**

Local units of government; Broadband providers; Community and regional organizations

#### **Timeline:**

The broadband liaisons and community stakeholders should begin meeting with internet service providers within three months of receiving this plan. While the counties do not have to allocate funding or spend federal dollars within that same three months, they should outline the scope of broadband infrastructure projects (ongoing and planned) within that timeline.

#### **Resources:**

- Guide to Federal Broadband Funding Opportunities in the U.S. <https://www.internetsociety.org/resources/doc/2021/guide-to-broadband-funding-opportunities-in-us/>
- Current Broadband Funding <https://connectednation.org/current-broadband-funding>
- BroadbandUSA: Federal Funding Guide <https://broadbandusa.ntia.doc.gov/resources/federal>
- Guggenheim Partners <https://www.guggenheimpartners.com/>

### **Goal 3: Increase online engagement in Donley and Wheeler Counties through free digital literacy workshops.**

For those unfamiliar with the term, digital literacy seems like a complex concept. Put simply, it is an individual's ability to interact and exchange information via digital platforms efficiently and successfully. As the name suggests, digital literacy necessitates a level of competency and skill. Digital literacy then is an understanding of the digital environment and all the software, social media platforms, and lingo that come along with it. For rural Americans, digital literacy can be stunted by many things including lack of devices, engagement opportunities, and general infrastructure. By providing training workshops focused on digital readiness and inclusion, a community can equip its citizens for digital immersion and advancement for the here and now and into the future. Digital literacy and inclusion focus not just on access to devices and broadband internet, but the skills and ability needed to engage on these platforms. It is important for community residents and leaders to be digitally engaged to stay informed and connected.

#### **Objective:**

Implement digital literacy and digital skills workshops in each community with an emphasis on social media and website skills/training to ensure all residents and community leaders are equipped to access and use digital devices and services.

#### **Actions:**

**Action 1** – Not only should residents feel comfortable engaging online, but they should seek out the benefits offered by online platforms and tools. As such, the aforementioned broadband liaisons should identify regional and community partners who possess resources and expertise in producing free digital literacy and digital skills workshops. Workshops should address topics ranging from workforce skills to online safety. The intention is to equip residents and community leaders with the digital skills necessary to engage online.

#### **Workshop topics to consider:**

- Navigating social media
- How to use Microsoft Office Suite
- Online safety tips and tricks
- How to teleconference

### Community partners to consider:

- Community institutions and businesses who would directly benefit from greater online engagement (i.e., banks, telehealth providers, online schools)
- Libraries: G.B. Burton Memorial Library, Wheeler Public Library, Shamrock Community Library
- IT Directors: School and County level
- Broadband Providers
- The High Ground of Texas
- Panhandle Regional Planning Commission
- EDCs: Clarendon EDC, Wheeler County EDC, Shamrock EDC
- Chambers of Commerce: Clarendon, Wheeler, Shamrock

**Action 2** – Curriculum should be developed using publicly available programs, such as those offered by AARP, Digital Learn, and Drive (resources linked below), and county-sourced information. Workshops should take place at local facilities, such as the library or school gym, and be promoted through local media.

### Media outlets for marketing:

- County Star–News
- Legends 92.9/Legends 98.9
- KSLR Radio
- The Clarendon Enterprise

**Action 3**– The broadband liaisons should identify community partners for the workshops. Partners can include financial supporters, guest speakers/presenters, and curriculum developers. Specifically, the broadband liaisons should consider inviting ISPs to sponsor or attend the workshop, as a successful community event could translate to more business for the provider. Additionally, the liaisons should utilize public officials (i.e., police officers) and local businessowners to lead workshops on topics such as cybersecurity and social media. The digital engagement workshops should be a community effort. Not only should the curriculum meet the needs of the residents and community leaders, but residents and leaders should likewise contribute content and resources according to their specialty within the community.

### Responsible Parties:

Media outlets; Broadband providers; Community anchor institutions: schools; libraries; Local units of government

### Timeline:

Donley and Wheeler Counties should implement digital inclusion and literacy programs by the end of 2021. Curriculum building and resource gathering can begin immediately to ensure a timely start to community

workshops. Every six months, the community should evaluate the status of available curricula to determine if updates are needed.

**Resources:**

- Texas Broadband Providers by County <https://connectednation.org/texas/planning/>
- The complete guide to digital skills <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/blog/the-complete-guide-to-digital-skills>
- AARP Joins with Nonprofit to Teach Tech to Older Adults <https://www.aarp.org/about-aarp/info-2021/oats-senior-planet.html>
- Digital Learn: Use a computer to do almost anything! <https://www.digitallearn.org/>
- [Driveyourlearning.org](https://driveyourlearning.org)