

Arkansas broadband access maps released

By *The City Wire* staff

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Connect Arkansas has released six “maps” that show the availability of high-speed wireless, broadband and satellite Internet connections in Arkansas.

[The maps](#) are part of an ongoing process by Connect Arkansas — a component of Little Rock-based Arkansas Capital Corp. — to detail the haves and have nots with respect to broadband access.

Connect Arkansas [received a \\$1.6 million grant](#) in 2009 from the National Telecommunications Information Administration to develop the maps and collect data on broadband availability in the state. The NTIA also provided \$500,000 to Connect Arkansas for a 5-year broadband planning program.

“To create these detailed maps, our GIS analysts worked closely with broadband service providers to request the necessary data for robust and detailed maps, as required by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration,” C. Sam Walls, president of Connect Arkansas and head of the Arkansas Capital Corp., said in a recent note. “We appreciated superb cooperation from the provider community to supply the data for the new maps. Without their collaboration, we could not have completed the map with such a high degree of accuracy or completeness.”

Connect Arkansas has said the maps are a necessary part of determining where to spend time and resources addressing broadband inadequacies.

“These maps show where access is available, and more importantly, where access is not available. With this information, broadband providers can strategically optimize their network deployment plans and communities can further their Information Technology (IT) planning initiatives,” according to Connect Arkansas literature.

Emerson Evans, with Connect Arkansas, said more detailed county maps will be ready within 7 to 10 days. And by this fall, he said interactive maps will be available so a person can enter their address to learn more about access options — including info on levels of access available and the telecom providers in their area.

“It will be based along the lines of Google maps. It will tell you whether you have broadband and who you can get broadband from,” Evans explained.

According to the 2008 State New Economy Index, which ranks states based on their ability to compete in the new economy, Arkansas ranked 47th in the nation and ranked 49th in deployment of broadband telecommunications.

A primary reason the state lags in broadband access is because of its rural nature, which may create cost issues for conventional telecoms deploying broadband. Also, the lack of education and understanding of broadband’s role in economic growth and community development is lacking, according to Connect Arkansas.

Connect Arkansas provides this data on broadband use in Arkansas: “In a statewide survey of 608 registered Arkansas voters, 29% of respondents had ‘never used the internet,’ while another 7% were unsure of what broadband, or high speed internet access, meant. In addition, it has been found that in Arkansas, although 87% of our population has access, there is a significant percentage of the population (51%) that do not even subscribe to the internet. Many of these individuals cite that it is not relevant to them, while others cite that computer ownership is not important.”

Finding ways to encourage broadband development and use was behind the March 2007 creation of the Connect Arkansas Broadband Act. The law, which created Connect Arkansas, is designed to map the state’s broadband infrastructure, initiate “community strategic planning do drive Internet adoption,” and encourage “public access points” to foster more Internet use.

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