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Report: Mendocino County among unserved, by FCC standards

AT&T still working on fiber optic deployment

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A UC Berkeley analysis released last month shows Mendocino County is among 14 rural California counties in which virtually no household has access to wireline, or fiber-based, broadband at reliable speeds. The report, published by the university's Haas Institute, argues economic disparity in AT&T's distribution of fiber-to-the-home networks in California.

“Instead of providing equitable access to this invaluable resource (all-fiber internet service), AT&T is unfairly denying millions of middle and working-class Californians the modern technologies needed to thrive in the data-rich, fast-paced digital world,” said Eli Moore, program manager at the Haas Institute and co-author of the

report.

Based on data as of June 30, 2016, the report states rural communities like Mendocino County lose out with internet speeds that fail to meet minimum standards, due to a lack of fiber deployment regulation by the state Public Utilities Commission and the FCC. According to the report, Mendocino County has 9,637 households (39 percent) with download speeds of less than 6 mbps, the PUC minimum standard, and 8,238 households (24 percent) with no AT&T broadband, as of Dec. 15, 2015, placing it in the bottom 10 among all California counties. The report also shows zero households in Mendocino County have access to download speeds of 25/3 mbps, the minimum standard set by the FCC.

Trish Steel, chairwoman of the Broadband Alliance of Mendocino County, said the report proves once again the sorry state of internet in the county.

“This report is important because rural areas have a persistent digital divide. Economic development, health, education and public safety continue to be compromised by inadequate broadband service. Our many small businesses are especially damaged by this lack of broadband,” she said.

Steel said she frequently hears about people moving out of Mendocino County because they cannot get the internet they need for themselves or their businesses. One example she gave was Lark in the Morning, a music store that started on dial-up in 1991 but fell behind the advent of DSL, never able to get on the boat for 26 years. The owner recently sold the business to another in Berkeley who could get the internet speed needed to run it properly.

“We in rural areas don't expect to be at the forefront of new technologies, but after 26 years he still can't get

any internet from his telecommunications provider? That's discouraging," she said.

AT&T responded to the report by saying it doesn't show the big picture, focusing on only wireline broadband distributed by one company.

"We do not favor any demographic when it comes to providing any service we offer. The market for internet service has never been more vibrant and competitive, both wireless and wireline. We would like nothing more than to serve every customer who wants our services," said Steven Maviglio, an AT&T spokesman.

Maviglio said the report ignores AT&T's effort to provide its Fixed Wireless Internet service to more than 140,000 households and small businesses in rural areas by 2020 through the Connect America Fund. That includes 7,500 households with little or no service in Mendocino County, [as an AT&T executive told the Board of Supervisors in November](#).

AT&T was still in the process of scouting cell towers and possible sites to build new ones for the fixed wireless project as of January. The company said in November the project would be 40 percent completed by the end of this year.

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