

Broadband Data Collection and Mapping Update

DCA and the GTA entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on July 1, 2018. This designated GTA as DCA's authorized agent to gather and/or create the broadband data and maps required to satisfy the mapping requirements of the legislation. This mapping and analysis will show where broadband services are unavailable in Georgia and clarify where broadband services might be funded through a grant program.

GTA contracted UGA's Carl Vinson Institute of Government (CVIOG) to execute a broadband mapping strategy which will support the state's goals. GTA has contributed resources to assist CVIOG with the mapping plan, which involved both publication of an initial map (Phase I) based entirely on FCC data and a subsequent enhanced mapping program (Phase II) that launched with a three-county pilot.

Phase I is complete and consisted of analysis of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Form 477 data, which is submitted by providers. This data has been used to compile the Phase I broadband maps. Analysis of 2017 FCC data indicates 45,920 "unserved" census blocks in Georgia. These census blocks are presumed to be 100% unserved, as the FCC methodology considers a census block "served" if a single location within the geography has broadband access. There are 347,969 individual locations in the "unserved" census blocks.

Legislation stipulates that GBDI will focus on "unserved" areas (based on broadband speed of 25/3). Given the widely-recognized inaccuracies of the FCC methodology, Phase II mapping and analysis is anticipated to identify additional locations that are not captured in FCC data.

Phase II, which is underway, will evaluate each of Georgia's 165,310 census blocks and an estimated 3,831,863 locations. To accomplish this objective, it is necessary to develop a Master Address File (which currently does not exist) by county. This data will then be shared with all existing providers, who are expected to share – under strict trade secret protection – the precise data about which locations they currently serve.

Given the enormity of Phase II task, a pilot program was launched in September 2018 focused on 3 counties for which existing Master Address File data was available. Providers in Elbert, Lumpkin, and Tift Counties were provided location-level address data and requested to respond with service availability data. This proved to be an excellent learning process, and provider feedback enabled some improvements in the process. The three-county pilot was completed in March 2019, and analysis suggests the process is extremely useful.

To compile a comprehensive Master Address File by county, GBDI is requesting and collecting address data from local governments, property appraisers, e911 coordinators, and power companies. The address data will be geocoded for map address accuracy. To date, the response from providers, local governments, and EMCs to assist in this collection and mapping effort has been positive and invaluable. However, this process will take time, and interim alternatives – such as purchasing data that is less accurate and reliable – are also being considered.