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With most of the Northeastern United States hurtling toward super-fast communications, towns in a swath of rural South Jersey fear being left far behind - even off the grid at times.

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Wireless reception can be weak there, officials say, because of a dearth of cell towers and because Verizon Communications Inc.'s decades-old copper lines, hanging from telephone poles or snaking through underground conduit, hum, crackle, or go dead during rainstorms or fog. These lines also deliver DSL Internet. Comcast Corp.'s Xfinity services may be available in some areas, but not in others. "In three to five years, there will be no dial tone, and what recourse will residents have?" asked Greg Facemyer, a committeeman in

Hopewell Township, Cumberland County. "The scariest thing is that this is New Jersey, which is the most densely populated state in the country, and if we can't get 100 percent wired-out, good luck to other states."

Tim Van Meter, 36, a farmer and schoolteacher who lives in Hopewell, said that his phone can hum on sunny days and that on rainy days he doesn't even bother using it. Verizon hasn't extended DSL Internet service to his home, and cable doesn't come within about a mile of him. "This is 2016, and I can't get the Internet," Van Meter said.

Verizon spokesman Ray McConville said this week that the telecom company had reviewed customer-service reports and that its South Jersey service quality conformed with state standards. He also said the company had invested "tens of millions of dollars to improve our copper network in South Jersey and maintain the reliability of telephone service for our customers, especially those with critical service needs like hospitals, fire, and police departments."

But McConville added that Verizon intended to meet with the mayors of 16 towns spread over Cumberland, Atlantic, Salem, and Gloucester Counties in the next month to hear more of their concerns.

The South Jersey towns' complaints reflect the evolution of the nation's communications network, in which telecom companies upgrade the technology in some areas - such as wealthier suburbs - but overlook others.

Stefanie Brand, director of the New Jersey Division of the Rate Counsel, a consumer-advocacy agency, said that "it's my understanding that the problem exists in more than 16 towns, but these are the towns that took the initiative." Brand said the towns were being squeezed by Verizon, which has decided not to wire them for new fiber-optic FiOS services but also doesn't appear to be maintaining the old copper network.

The municipalities, in addition to Hopewell, are Estell Manor, Weymouth, Alloway, Lower Alloways Creek, Mannington, Pilesgrove, Upper Pittsgrove, South Harrison, Commercial, Downe, Lawrence, Maurice River, Millville, Upper Deerfield, and Fairfield. They filed their complaint with the Board of Public Utilities in late November, claiming deteriorating phone service. Agency spokesman Earl Pierce said the Board of Public Utilities was "reviewing the complaint and awaiting Verizon's answer."

The South Jersey complaints are similar to those aired in late 2015 by the Communications Workers of America, which submitted to the Pennsylvania Public Utility Commission more than 100 photos of what appeared to be rundown or broken parts of Verizon's copper-phone network. The union has asked the PUC to investigate. The CWA and the South Jersey towns say that Verizon, as the local telephone provider, has the legal obligation to invest funds into the copper lines when it doesn't build out fiber-optic lines to extend FiOS services to those areas.

Hopewell Township officials have mapped for regulators the local residents who have reported problems with their phones. "You have people who will fall into the digital divide who will never, ever, ever get phone service," Facemyer said, "and that will affect the value of homes and it will discourage businesses from locating here or expanding here because they won't have access to 21st-century technology, or 20th-century technology."
– *Philadelphia Inquirer*

T-Mobile US Inc. executives fired shots at critics who say the carrier may be violating net-neutrality rules with its free video-streaming program and said they are "baffled" by YouTube's objection to the program. T-Mobile recently began offering a service that delivers video at lower quality in exchange for waiving related data fees. YouTube and its allies have criticized the carrier for lowering the quality of video that isn't part of the program. The spat comes as federal regulators examine the wireless carrier's streaming-video strategy.

At a Citigroup investor conference Wednesday, T-Mobile executives shot back, saying YouTube's stance is "absurd." YouTube is owned by Alphabet Inc. "We are kind of dumbfounded, that a company like YouTube would think that adding this choice would somehow be a bad thing," said T-Mobile Chief Operating Officer Mike Sievert. He said YouTube hasn't "done the work yet to become part of the free service."

YouTube didn't immediately respond to requests for comment. A T-Mobile spokeswoman declined to comment beyond the executives' statements. Binge On, T-Mobile's free streaming program, has worried some consumer advocates, who warn the service could be the beginning of attempts to circumvent the net-neutrality rules, which generally require that all Internet data be treated equally. T-Mobile argues the program is in line with the regulations, keeps consumers in control because it can be turned off, and is open to all video providers that meet its basic technical requirements. Mr. Sievert notes that customers viewing YouTube videos using Binge On are being charged for their data, but get three times more video because of the quality reduction.

Last month, YouTube said T-Mobile is interfering with its video traffic by effectively throttling, or degrading, its traffic. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, a nonprofit privacy and advocacy organization, said this week that its tests confirm T-Mobile is throttling all

video, regardless if the video is part of Binge On. The organization wants the FCC to investigate the practice if T-Mobile doesn't change it. "It's pretty obvious that throttling all traffic based on application type definitely violates the principles of net neutrality," the group said in a report.

Jeremy Gillula, the staff technologist at the EFF who wrote the report, said the group wouldn't object to the program if T-Mobile made it clear that all video was being throttled and if customers could "opt in rather than have it automatically turned it on by the carrier". "We aren't big fans of the way that T-Mobile has gone about it," he said.

The Federal Communications Commission's net-neutrality rules, adopted in February, are designed to ensure Internet providers don't discriminate against traffic from particular sources, including throttling a class of applications. Last month, FCC Chairman Tom Wheeler said the agency sent letters to T-Mobile, Comcast Corp. and AT&T Inc. to get more information about new services they are offering.

On Wednesday, T-Mobile reported strong customer additions for the fourth quarter, bringing in 1.3 million mainstream subscribers as it continues to use promotions and marketing to gain market share in the competitive industry. Sprint Corp. said Wednesday it would extend by 30 days its offer to sell service plans at half the rate charged by rivals.

– *Wall Street Journal*

Netflix Inc. said Wednesday that it had tripled its reach globally by expanding into an additional 130 countries as the video-streaming service took its most aggressive step yet in its plans for international growth. The announcement, made by Netflix Chief Executive Reed Hastings at the annual Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas, boosted the company's stock price. Shares, up 144% over the past year, rose 9% to \$117.68.

With the expansion into new markets like Russia, India, Singapore and Poland, Netflix is now available in more than 190 countries. The company also added service in Arabic, Korean and Chinese dialects to the 17 languages already supported. Netflix said its original programming, including "Daredevil," "Jessica Jones," "Narcos" and "Marco Polo," will be available to consumers in all markets. That won't be the case, at least initially, with many popular shows produced and distributed by major Hollywood studios. Netflix has global rights to some shows like Fox's "Gotham," AMC's "Breaking Bad" and ABC's "How to Get Away with Murder" but is still working to secure such rights for many shows.

In an interview, Mr. Hastings said the originals will nonetheless be the foundation of a compelling content offering. "As we looked at our new markets like Spain and Italy, the viewing of our originals is just huge," Mr. Hastings said. "We gained confidence that we could launch with our core content offering being originals."

Eventually, Netflix's goal is for all of its services globally to have similar content offerings, including all of the major shows consumers are accustomed to finding on the U.S. version of the service. "It will take a while to bring the catalogs together," he said. There is resistance from foreign media companies seeking the same rights in their home markets and studio executives who are wary of Netflix's growing power.

Netflix isn't yet available in China but said it continues to explore options for providing the service. "Right now we're in the relationship-building phase," Mr. Hastings said. "Getting to know partners and government." Netflix also won't be available in Crimea, North Korea and Syria because of U.S. government restrictions on American companies. At the start of 2015, Netflix released a letter to shareholders unveiling plans to branch into 200 countries. The company has signaled it plans to complete the global rollout by the end of this year.

Netflix, first launched in 2007, took its initial international steps in Canada, followed by Latin America, Europe, Australia and Japan. The company has been growing faster overseas than in the U.S. In the third quarter, the streaming-video provider added 880,000

domestic subscribers, lower than the 1.15 million subscribers it projected in July and a slowdown from the addition of 980,000 customers in the year-earlier quarter.

Overseas, however, the company signed up more users than it expected, adding 2.74 million subscribers compared with a forecast of 2.4 million. As Netflix has expanded, costs and exposure to currency volatility have increased. In the latest reported quarter, international operations again weighed on profit, as the segment's third-quarter loss more than doubled to \$68 million. – *Wall Street Journal*



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