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January 15, 2020

The Hill
Keeping US
elections safe from
hackers

Officials from Westmoreland and seven neighboring counties are studying a proposal for local governing entities to step up and invest in infrastructure needed to expand or enhance broadband connectivity in under-served areas.

Reuters
U.S. judge hears
closing arguments
in T-Mobile-Sprint
merger trial

About a dozen stakeholders from multiple counties attended **a kickoff meeting Tuesday at Ligonier Town Hall** for the Regional Broadband Task Force study. Meanwhile, Virginia-based consultant Design Nine is preparing a survey to gauge how citizens are obtaining internet service, what they're paying for it and how they want to use it. The survey soon will be available to complete online or using paper copies.

USA Today
Sure, PBS is now on
YouTubeTV, but a
better deal is its free
streaming app

According to estimates based on a previous survey, nearly 6% of the 928,919 residents in the eight targeted counties (also including Fayette, Cambria, Somerset, Blair, Bedford, Huntingdon and Fulton) lack access to wired broadband service of at least 25 megabits per second download and 3 megabits per second upload.

Hollywood
Reporter
CBS Sports Nabs
U.S. TV Rights to
New 3-on-3 Pro
Hockey League

In Westmoreland, the most populous county in the study, 2.3% of the 354,751 residents fall below that level of service. About 1.6% of Blair County's 123,842 population and 2.2% of Cambria County's 134,550 population are lacking that basic level of connectivity. At the other end of the spectrum, 55.2% of Fulton County's 14,506 residents are without the service. James Smith, president of the Greensburg-based Economic Growth Connection, argued that the 25 mbps benchmark is

Bloomberg
Twitter's Top Lawyer
Is Final Word on

[Blocking Tweets—
Even Donald
Trump's](#)

**Philadelphia
Inquirer**

[Pennsylvania is
getting a different
kind of 'early voting'
in time for the 2020
election](#)

**Philadelphia
Inquirer**

[How Pennsylvania
teens are preparing
to cast their first
vote for president:
'The boys mostly
like Trump'](#)

**Allentown
Morning Call**

[Why is hailing
Soleimani's death
on the Pennsylvania
legislature's
agenda?](#)

outdated as a connectivity goal, especially for businesses. "I've got businesses telling me if they don't have a (gigabit per second), it's not sufficient," he said. "This is a business necessity moving forward, just like electricity. If we don't have the ability to offer that, we're going to lose."

Smith cited connectivity issues at a business incubator in New Kensington. "They do very large video files," he said. "They cannot move those files right now to the clients they need to move them to." The intent is for the study to reflect the varied levels of internet service needed by different communities across the region, said Brandon Carson, director of planning for the Altoona-based [Southern Alleghenies Planning and Development Commission](#) that appointed the task force in 2018. He cited major health care facilities among typically heavy users of data. "Do we start with what we can now, and try to roll out better service to folks who are limited to about dial-up?" Carson asked. "Farmers now are actually big broadband users," said Jack Maytum, senior business analyst for Design Nine. He explained some owners track their cattle using radio frequency identification tags.

Maytum agreed that broadband connectivity has become a necessity, handicapping towns that lack it in the competition for jobs. "In some communities, it's almost a panic," he said. "They're losing the fight for economic advancement." To address that problem, Maytum suggested municipal governments consider investing in the infrastructure — underground conduits, utility poles and communications towers — that can be leased to wireless or fiber-optic broadband service providers.

He argued that wireless service alone can't satisfy the demand. "The radio spectrum is limited," he noted, while, with fiber-optic cable, he said, "the information capacity is practically unlimited. Fiber is the backbone of the infrastructure." He acknowledged that wireless expansion, through tower development, can be achieved more quickly than expansion of the fiber network. With the [study that is in its beginning stages](#), Maytum suggested the eight counties are "ahead of the game. You're ahead of most areas."

The study is being funded by a \$50,000 grant from the [Appalachian Regional Commission](#), with each participating county paying a \$6,250 share toward the local match. The study will include cost estimates for developing recommended broadband infrastructure in the region. Maytum said Design One representatives will return to conduct a round of public meetings once a draft version of the study is available. — **Pittsburgh Tribune-Review**

Comcast Corp. is funding a new startup accelerator in a bid to connect its media properties and sports league partners with emerging marketing, media and technology companies, the company said. Comcast will initially invest more than \$15 million annually in the Atlanta-based program, called SportsTech, which will focus on startups across eight categories including sports media and entertainment; player and fan engagement; venue and event innovation; esports; and fantasy sports and betting.

SportsTech will take stakes in companies focused on streaming and content distribution; data-based sponsorships and advertising; athlete and player performance; game analytics; ticketing; merchandising; and e-commerce, among other areas. Accelerators typically bet on startups

relatively early in their investment cycles, providing funding as well as advice and access to other resources to help young companies reach the next level. By starting its own sports accelerator, Comcast hopes to discover emerging-technology companies that can help its business—before rivals do, and before the successes become more expensive to hire, invest in or buy later on. “It will allow us to see things earlier and be at the forefront rather than go pay a premium after the fact,” said Bill Connors, president of Comcast Cable’s Central Division.

Media companies and marketers are increasingly using technology to connect with fans across platforms. For example, Facebook Inc. - owned Instagram has been recruiting sports leagues, teams and athletes to sell merchandise through its platform. Comcast already has interests in different aspects of sports, including broadcasting live games on its TV networks such as NBC, and a business that brings broadband and other technology to live sports venues. A venture like SportsTech can help advance those efforts, Mr. Connors said.

SportsTech will choose 10 companies to start its three-month program by August. In exchange for a minimum of 6% of equity, SportsTech will invest \$50,000 into each company, in addition to providing other financial and business services support, according to executives. League partners will join SportsTech for terms lasting a minimum of three years, offering the startups in its program counseling and access to their organizations. The leagues will also have the option of taking their own equity in startups that go through the accelerator, Mr. Connors said. Nascar and two U.S. Olympic sports organizations, U.S. Ski Snowboard and USA Swimming, have signed on to participate.

Comcast, which also has broadcast rights to the National Hockey League and the Premier League, among other leagues, expects its various sports partners to move in and out of the accelerator as it suits them, Mr. Connors said. Comcast’s NBC Sports and Sky Sports will also be involved, providing access and insights as well as serving as testbeds for startups’ tech. Comcast Ventures, the company’s venture capital arm, will advise SportsTech, the company said.

SportsTech operations will be directed by Boomtown Accelerators, a Boulder, Colo.-based accelerator operator that has previously worked with Comcast on The Farm, a separate Atlanta-based startup hub sponsored by Comcast and NBCUniversal. Comcast and Boomtown expect to hire 15 to 20 people to operate the accelerator. “Sports tech startups have the same challenges that other early-stage startups have, which is access to sports industry experts—those who understand the nuances of the sport and who can help make the difference between success and failure,” said Toby Krout, chief executive of Boomtown Accelerators. “Tech founders can have instincts about how a product or service can disrupt businesses, but don’t always understand the nuances of particular sports.”

SportsTech is an outgrowth of other investment efforts by Comcast through existing ventures such as Lift Labs and The Farm. Those programs don’t specifically focus on sports, but many of the startups that have applied to them in the past did, which gave Comcast the idea to create an accelerator focused specifically on sports, said Mr. Connors. – *Wall Street Journal*

Pennsylvania is home to the fourth-largest stateside population of Puerto Ricans, which continues to grow largely because of migration driven by natural disasters in Puerto Rico and expected to increase after the onslaught of recent earthquakes. The state's Hispanic community is the fastest-growing segment of the population, [accounting](#) for more than 50% of Pennsylvania's population growth in the last two decades. As this trend continues, it becomes even more important for the state's leaders to ensure our communities have the tools they need to prosper, while also helping those who come to the state in need. It's no doubt that accessibility to the next generation of wireless — 5G — will be one of the most critical of these tools as we move into 2020.

The coming decade promises even more advancements that will optimize businesses, streamline production and transportation, facilitate educational programs, and improve citizen services. But without reliable access to a network that can support these technologies, thousands of Pennsylvanians and millions of Americans will be left on the wrong side of the digital divide.

As the founder and executive director of the National Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce, I've made supporting innovation and businesses on the mainland United States and Puerto Rico one of my top priorities. So how do we ensure inclusive access to the 5G future? [Governor Wolf's Broadband Initiative](#) is one positive step forward. But there's more to be done, and we need a disruptive force to catalyze change. That's why I support the pending merger between T-Mobile and Sprint, which would accelerate 5G innovation and increase competition in the wireless market.

Together, T-Mobile and Sprint are shaped to be that disruptive force. With complementary spectrum portfolios, T-Mobile and Sprint have a combined \$40 billion investment in nationwide 5G networks and services. The newly formed "New T-Mobile" will help to close the digital divide across the country and drive inclusive 5G access, a concern close to the heart of legislators, local leaders, and businesses of all sizes.

Puerto Ricans increasingly need access to affordable and reliable high-speed connectivity to manage their businesses and reach customers; it's worth noting that 4.4 million Hispanic-owned businesses contribute more than \$700 billion to the U.S. economy every year. New T-Mobile will only add to the efforts to provide the connectivity they need. Within three years of the merger's close, for example, the companies have promised to cover 97% of the country's population and 85% of rural Americans.

By 2024, this new network will also have nearly twice the capacity of the combined stand-alone networks and three times the 5G capacity. As New T-Mobile seeks to fill this network capacity with users, it will continue to have an incentive to compete aggressively on price and quality of service against incumbent providers. In fact, T-Mobile has already [announced](#) that after the close of the merger, T-Mobile Connect's low-cost services will reduce prices substantially.

In the spirit of better connecting the under-connected, New T-Mobile has announced other post-merger initiatives to better serve these

communities, which will be especially advantageous to many of our established and newly arriving Puerto Rican constituents. After the merger, for example, New T-Mobile will launch Project 10 Million, aiming to end the homework gap by offering free service, hot spots, and low-cost devices to 10 million households and families over five years. The company has also **signed** one of the largest and most comprehensive memorandums of understanding with leading civil rights organizations, recommitting to investing in the communities it serves.

The Department of Justice and Federal Communications Commission have approved the merger, while 18 of the 19 required state public utility commissions have also acted favorably. As we are clearly now in the final stages of this merger, our communities are hopeful that the transaction can close quickly so that we can begin to realize many of these massive benefits across Pennsylvania, as well as for all American businesses and consumers. – **Op-ed in *Philadelphia Inquirer* by Justin Vélez-Hagan, executive director of the National Puerto Rican Chamber of Commerce**



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