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Do you live in an area of Erie County where internet access is limited, slow or prone to outages and delays? If so, Erie County government wants to hear from you.

In an effort to expand high-speed broadband service, Erie County Executive Kathy Dahlkemper's administration is asking residents, especially those with slow broadband service or no service at all, to complete a short survey. The results will help the county determine areas that need addressed as officials work with internet service providers, utility companies, broadband organizations, municipalities and the state and federal governments to expand access.

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The survey is available online at <https://broadband.eriecountypa.gov> or by calling (814) 451-7440. The goal is expand broadband access to all of the county's 274,541 resident. Broadband is defined as minimum speeds of 25 megabits per second for downloads and 3 megabits per second for uploads. Currently, 99 percent of the geographic area north of Interstate 90 has access to high-speed broadband service, but only 25 percent of the area south of the interstate does.

The coverage area is expected to grow some by 2020, opening up broadband services to thousands of Erie County residents. Specifically, broadband access will expand to an area bound by Peach Street on the west, I-90 and I-86 to the north, and an area that roughly runs from Route 89, Route 8 and Wattsburg Road on the east and south.

It's part of [a project by Butler-based Armstrong Broadband](#), which began installation last fall. Armstrong received \$2.6 million from the federal Connect America Fund and another \$1.2 million from Pennsylvania's Broadband Investment Incentive Program.

Shawn Beqaj, Armstrong's vice president of regulatory policy and interconnection (and BCAP Board of Directors member), told the Erie Times-News in March that the company is spending as much as three times that amount to expand to those areas of southern and eastern Erie County. But without the grant funds, he said at the time, the expansion wouldn't be possible long-term. The cost to install, maintain and operate lines in areas where there are only four or five homes per mile wouldn't be profitable, he said. That's why other internet service providers have been hesitant to expand in rural areas, including those in Erie, Crawford and Mercer counties.

The county's survey will help identify gaps in coverage and determine where state and federal funding should be used. "We encourage all residents to take the survey, either on their computer, on their mobile device or by phone," Dahlkemper said in a prepared statement. "We are working hard to make high-speed internet more affordable and accessible in all corners of the county, but we need input from our citizens to help make that happen." The survey website also lists alternative broadband options for residents who live outside an existing coverage area. Those options include mobile and satellite broadband services. – **Erie Times-News**

U.S. Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Chairman Ajit Pai will propose on Wednesday granting mobile phone companies new powers to block the rising number of unwanted "robocalls", industry officials briefed on the plans said. The U.S. telecommunications regulator is expected to take action on Pai's proposal at its June 6 meeting. The FCC declined to comment on Tuesday ahead of Pai's expected announcement.

Pai and the other four FCC commissioners are set to testify later on Wednesday before a U.S. House panel amid frustration in Congress and among U.S. consumers over the rising number of robocalls. YouMail, a company that blocks robocalls and tracks them, estimated there were 4.9 billion unwanted U.S. calls last month after nearly 48 billion in 2018, which was up nearly 60 percent over 2017.

Three-quarters of the U.S. Senate backs legislation to provide regulators and law enforcement additional tools to prevent illegal robocalls and punish robocallers. The bill would also make it easier for the FCC to seek financial penalties. In May 2018, Pai called on companies to adopt an industry-developed “call authentication system” for the cryptographic signing of telephone calls aimed at ending the use of illegitimate spoofed numbers from the telephone system.

Pai said this week he expects major phone providers to implement those caller ID standards this year and will host a summit on July 11 to review the industry’s progress. “We chose this industry-led path because it is the fastest way to help consumers, but I remain committed to taking regulatory action” if carriers do not act this year, Pai said in a statement on Monday.

In November, Pai wrote to the chief executives of major telephone service providers including AT&T Inc, Verizon Communications Inc, Sprint Corp and other companies, demanding they launch the system no later than 2019 to combat robocalls. FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, a Democrat, said this week that the FCC should “require call authentication technology” and “make available free tools to consumers to block these calls.” She also urged the FCC to set up a “robocall enforcement division.” – **Reuters**

A bi-partisan group of Senators is working to address concerns about broadband mapping. The Federal Communications Commission uses it to determine how billions of dollars are distributed to increase access to broadband. Some lawmakers worry the current mapping process has flaws and needs to be updated to make sure rural and underserved areas get the funding they need.

Senators said access to broadband is all about location. "I can drive through my state and tell you where we are going to have dropped service and no service" said Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, (R) West Virginia. Senator Capito said current maps used by the FCC to distribute funding don't accurately show where there is poor or no connectivity. Members of the bi-partisan Senate Broadband Caucus said without good data, they can't pass policies to effectively address the problem. "If we don't get this right we can't get anything else right" said John Boozman (R) Arkansas.

"The FCC's maps overstate coverage in many rural areas" said Senator Amy Klobachur (D) Minnesota. "This means communities that need help to deploy broadband are ineligible to receive federal funds". The Federal Communications Commission agrees its collection process has flaws. But officials said updating the mapping process takes time. "It's challenging with a 150 million or so addresses nationwide," said Kris Monteith, FCC Wireline Competition Bureau

Lawmakers are working on ways to speed up the drawing of more accurate maps. One proposed bill directs the FCC to consider using consumer reported data as well as data from state and local governments. Supporters said federal officials, carriers and other stakeholders must work together on solutions or underserved communities will continue to struggle. "If those of us who are left behind in the digital divide aren't able to close that divide we are going to drag the rest of our state and our regions with us. We don't want to

see that" said Senator Capito. Lawmakers are also pushing for broadband funding to be included in any infrastructure deal. – **Nexstar Broadcasting**

Two days after President Trump rallied his base in Florida's Panhandle, vowing hundreds of millions of dollars in aid for the hurricane-devastated region, three local radio stations said they would air Trump speeches daily until the 2020 election.

The stations will broadcast two-minute snippets of Trump speeches every hour of every day -- perhaps sometimes twice an hour -- until the end of the presidential race, owner Samuel Rogatinsky said. "We ran it by a bunch of listeners and people in the area, and nobody's upset about it. It's Republican territory," Rogatinsky said Monday. "Nobody's offended by it. It's not an issue." He said Panhandle residents who have felt forgotten in the seven months since the Category 5 storm devastated the region were heartened by Trump's speech at his rally Wednesday in Panama City Beach. "No games, no gimmicks, no delays," Trump vowed of the funding. "We're just doing it."

Rogatinsky's newly formed company, Gulf Coast Media, recently purchased Classic Rock WRBA-FM 95.9, Country WKNK-FM "Hank FM" and Adult Hits WASJ-FM "BOB FM," whose signals cover Bay County. Hurricane Michael damaged the stations' facilities so badly last fall that they went off the air for several months. "Gulf Coast Media, Inc. senior management acknowledged that broadcasting the President's speeches may not be consistent with conventional commercial FM radio, but we have taken this approach to show the community's sincere appreciation for President Donald Trump's work in Panama City and Bay County," [the company said in a news release](#).

Rogatinsky, a Fort Lauderdale-based attorney, bought the three radio stations from Powell Broadcasting Company late last year. [Rogatinsky told MSN](#) the stations will offer similar airtime to other candidates if requested, to comply with the Federal Communications Commission's equal time guidelines. "Really, we just want to have inspirational type things because the community is so down," he told the Orlando Sentinel on Monday. "Nobody else is really promising or doing anything. They want to hear what he has to say." – **Orlando Sentinel**

