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Midco, a midtier cable operator with around 385,000 customers across South Dakota, North Dakota, Minnesota, Kansas and Wisconsin, is getting into the fixed wireless game. It's the latest cable operator to decide that wireless technology is cheaper and easier to deploy than fiber in rural and other hard-to-reach areas.

Perhaps most interestingly, a top executive from the company is using Midco's fixed wireless service at his own rural farmstead in North Dakota because the company's wired services haven't been deployed there. "On a normal day, my three kids are streaming video or other content, while my wife is using the internet to run a small business, so this service has been a great asset for our family," said Justin Forde, Midco's director of government relations.

Midco [acquired Minnesota-based fixed wireless provider InvisiMax](#) in February after partnering with the company to deploy wireless services in Brooktree Park, North Dakota. Forde said that Midco is now expanding that fixed wireless service more broadly in the rural areas within the operator's footprint. "Currently, Midco fixed wireless provides internet connectivity at speeds up to 50 Mbps download and 10 Mbps upload and higher, depending on customer need. Data travels over our fiber network to a tower fed by our fiber, called a 'fiber backhaul tower,' and then the signal is broadcast from tower to tower and ultimately to the customer using spectrum.

Fixed wireless allows us to reach remote, rural areas that are up to 50 miles away from our fiber network, and we can implement this solution relatively quickly and without the effort or expense of constructing fiber networks," Midco's Forde explained in [testimony](#) recently at House of Representatives hearing on rural broadband. "We can also deploy new fixed wireless networks during the winter months, when harsh weather makes fiber construction impossible," Forde continued in his testimony. "Fixed wireless allows Midco to offer internet where the terrain makes it difficult, if not impossible, to provide fiber internet connectivity, such as through the Badlands of North Dakota and South Dakota, the granite fields in Northern Minnesota, or the limestone cliffs in Eastern Minnesota. This technology also allows Midco to reach vast areas of farmland where it is not economically feasible to run fiber to every farm, because there may be many miles between each farm."

Midco executives declined to provide additional details on Midco's fixed wireless efforts, including what spectrum the company uses and its build-out plans. In his testimony, Forde urged legislators at the hearing to release additional spectrum for fixed wireless services including in the 3.5 GHz, 2.5 GHz and 3.7-4.2 GHz bands.

Of course, Midco—which was founded in 1931 and first started providing cable internet services in 1996—isn't the only veteran of the telecom industry to begin moving toward fixed wireless technology. Charter, Comcast, AT&T, Windstream and C Spire are among the companies that are either testing or deploying various flavors of fixed wireless services. Moreover, many in the industry

believe this trend could accelerate as 5G technology becomes widely available. The technology promises to provide even faster speeds than today's wireless networks. Already, Sprint and T-Mobile **have promised** to deploy 5G-based fixed wireless, in-home internet services to roughly 9.5 million American households by 2024, or about 13% of the country, if their merger transaction is approved. – *Fierce Wireless*

Walmart Inc. is exploring a subscription video-streaming service that would seek to challenge Netflix Inc. and Amazon.com Inc. by offering programming that targets Middle America, according to people familiar with the plans. Planning is still in the early stages and Walmart hasn't given the project a green light, the people said. But a decision to move forward could come by late summer or early fall, according to one of these people. The retail giant would be late to the subscription video-streaming business, an increasingly crowded market that also includes Hulu and AT&T Inc.'s HBO.

Walmart is working with veteran television executive Mark Greenberg on the potential service, which could include a lower-price monthly subscription than those offered by Amazon and Netflix, according to people familiar with the plans. Walmart is considering programs that target consumers who live outside of large cities, said two of these people. Mr. Greenberg, who last year left his role as chief executive of Epix, a pay-television channel, has been advising Walmart for several months as it considers launching its own direct-to-consumer streaming service, the people said. He also held senior positions at pay channels Showtime and HBO.

If it proceeds, the subscription-based media venture would be separate from Vudu, the online movie-streaming service Walmart bought in 2010, the people said. Vudu, which allows users to buy or rent individual films, is widely available on televisions and streaming devices such as Roku, but hasn't attracted the usership of rivals. Among U.S. households that streamed video on a television at home in April, 73% watched Netflix, 50% YouTube, 36% Hulu, 28% Amazon Prime Video and 13% Vudu, according to comScore Inc. News of Walmart's potential programming strategy was earlier reported by The Information, a technology-news website.

Walmart could license existing content rather than produce original programming, though establishing its own brand of original content could be important to the success of a Walmart streaming service, as it has been for Netflix and others, because acquired shows can be readily available elsewhere. Producing original content would be a costly venture. The aggressiveness of Netflix has **driven up prices for talent for everyone**. This year, Netflix has indicated it is spending \$8 billion on original and acquired content. Amazon's programming budget is north of \$4 billion, while HBO will spend \$2.7 billion this year.

Programming, two people close to the project said, could be "middle of the road" and aimed at Walmart's core shoppers away from the coasts. The ratings success of the brief return of "Roseanne" on Walt Disney Co.'s ABC last spring indicated that there is a large audience not being served by most programmers. "They're catering to that Americana base," one person said. – *Wall Street Journal*



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127 State Street Harrisburg, PA 17101
717-214-2000 (f) 717-214-2020
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