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**Next TV**  
[Dish and DirecTV Merger 'Inevitable,' Egen Says](#)

**Washington Post**

Usually internet and cable companies are all hands on deck before major events — think Super Bowl. This May, the high school Advanced Placement tests, administered remotely in the midst of a pandemic, became the Super Bowl. “Because kids were now taking their AP tests online versus in person, our network team paid very special attention to that AP testing window,” said

**There's been a big gray area when it comes to cable news contributors dabbling in political campaigns**

**The Markup To Head Off Regulators, Google Makes Certain Words Taboo**

**Wired Bill Gates on Covid: Most US Tests Are 'Completely Garbage'**

**Politico The man Google loves to hate**

**Gulf Times SpaceX launches dozens of new satellites for internet network**

**NBC News Sensitive to claims of bias, Facebook relaxed misinformation rules for conservative pages**

**The Verge The U.S. declared war on TikTok because it can't handle the truth**

**Spotlight PA How arguments in Washington are holding up coronavirus relief in Pennsylvania**

**Philadelphia Inquirer Trump's path to winning Pa. runs through small Rust Belt towns — like one near Biden's hometown**

Josephine Posti, senior public relations manager for **Comcast**. "... Those major events, they have changed during this time."

The company's engineers used web-based tools and artificial intelligence to help them track any issues that were in the network. They could even identify kinks in a cable, and in many cases, correct something without any shutdowns, Ms. Posti said. Comcast and its counterparts in the industry faced a surge of internet traffic in March and April, as other parts of the economy largely shut down. Employees began meeting on video conferencing platforms instead of at the office. Students and teachers moved to online as well. And while essential workers continued to report to their workplaces, nobody could go to a bar, movie or dinner afterward to unwind. What else to do? Netflix and chill.

While some in the U.S. may have experienced outages, Western Pennsylvania's infrastructure did not fail its users, companies say. "Clearly there was a dramatic surge especially those first few weeks," said David Wittmann, vice president of cable marketing for **Armstrong**, an internet service provider in the Pittsburgh region.

Upstream traffic, meaning an output of data including video conferencing, increased during the day; downstream traffic, meaning streaming or downloading content, increased in the evening. "We were able to manage that, as most of the industry was, because we planned for significant overages," Mr. Wittmann said. "I can tell you that our engineers worked tirelessly that first month augmenting our network where we saw areas of congestion. ... They probably did as many augments in that month as they would in a year."

For those who wanted new service or upgrades, companies utilized two-way application for remote installation so that crews and customers could see what the other was doing during self-installation. "There's still a significant amount of folks who really don't want anyone in their home, understandably," Mr. Wittmann said. The company hired more crew to handle any advanced installations that required in-home appointments, he added, and cleared a waiting list by the end of June.

Average data usage pre-pandemic for Armstrong customers was roughly 350 gigabytes per month. That increased by about 100GB per month once shelter-in-place orders began, according to the company. Comcast saw an increase in upstream traffic by 32% and downstream traffic by 11% from early March to late May, Ms. Posti said. Verizon's network weathered the pandemic surge, "maintaining pre-COVID reliability levels even in the midst dramatic usage spikes and shifts in demand," according to its report that monitored the network from March 1 to May 31.

Verizon boasts of a network "engineered to perform during moments of crisis such as hurricanes, snow storms and flooding," according to the company's July 9 press release. But did internet service providers have a pandemic contingency plan on the shelf? "I can't tell you we planned for a pandemic, that would not be accurate, but we do plan for 18 to 24 months in the future for sure," Mr. Wittmann said, highlighting that a \$200 million project to install new infrastructure in the areas of Cranberry, Wexford and Pine, hasn't stopped.

"We keep very close tabs on how much data usage is growing. In general it's growing at a 40 percent compound annual growth rate, and that's before the pandemic. That's a staggering number. ... That's only going to continue. With that in mind we had that in our plan, and we had enough head room in our network capacity to handle that, that's why we were able to handle the surge without having an issue handling the problem."

A report by the San Francisco-based internet monitoring company ThousandEyes largely bolsters that claim, finding that while broadband interruptions spiked in some regions of North America post-pandemic, the outages likely occurred during non-business hours. Overall, the state of internet infrastructure is "healthy," the report found.

But some challenges were observed by the Washington-based Center for Democracy, namely redistribution issues because of the “massive shift from using network connections in office buildings to using them at home.” “I think a lot of us found out exactly how many video conferences our home connections could support at one time, which for many was only one,” Stan Adams, the organization’s deputy general counsel and open internet counsel, said in a written response to questions. “While it can be difficult to determine whether a bandwidth limitation stems from the ISP’s [internet service provider] network, your own local network (WiFi), or the other end of your connection, I think we saw pretty clearly that many ISP networks are not capable of providing the marketed speeds and throughput to every subscriber simultaneously.”

No major outages were reported to the organization, but that’s not the first thing on Mr. Adams’ mind. “For me, it’s tough to talk about ISPs meeting the needs of the communities they serve without talking about all those folks who remain unconnected, either because they cannot afford a connection or there are none available where they live. So while it’s important that existing customers receive the service they pay for, whether the performance of their connection lives up to expectations comes second to whether someone has access to the internet at all,” he said.

When the pandemic hit, 785 major industry players and smaller companies took a Federal Communications Commission pledge to “Keep Americans Connected,” by vowing not to turn off service and to expand low-income offerings through June 30, according to the FCC. FCC chairman Ajit Pai on June 19 urged the service providers not to disconnect those in need and urged Congress “to ensure that doctors and patients, students and teachers, low-income families and veterans, those who have lost their jobs and livelihoods due to the pandemic and the accompanying lockdowns … remain connected until this emergency ends.”

Comcast will continue to offer “extended payment options,” and through the end of 2020 new customers can sign up to receive 60 days of complimentary low-income Internet Essentials service. The company has also made Xfinity WiFi hotspots available to anyone who needs them for free, Ms. Posti said.

Armstrong has decided to permanently increase the download speed to 25 megabytes per second, from 12Mbps, and its upload, to 3Mbps from 1Mbps, for its low-income internet package, Mr. Wittmann said. Verizon will continue to offer a \$20-per-month discount on its low-income Lifeline internet service “for as long as they remain eligible,” according to the company’s website. New registrants will be accepted until the end of 2020. — **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette**

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Voters in the Philadelphia region will soon have a new way to cast their ballots.

Some of Pennsylvania’s largest counties are planning to create satellite election offices, where voters could request and submit a mail ballot on the spot, according to officials. That would provide for the first time [a form of in-person early voting](#) that is easily and widely available to all voters in those counties — at a moment when [the coronavirus, a surge in voting by mail](#), and [troubling post office delays](#) have cast a shadow on the very process of conducting the 2020 presidential election.

Philadelphia election officials hope to set up 17 such early voting sites, including at their main office at City Hall, if they can secure funding to do so and overcome other hurdles. Montgomery County officials are planning five locations, including at the county government office in Norristown. Delaware County officials have already approved two sites, in Upper Darby and Media, and are likely to approve a third in Chester. They are also hoping to create a portable office that can travel around Delaware County. And Bucks County officials will vote this week on a plan to set up three voting sites at government buildings in Quakertown, Doylestown, and Levittown.

These election offices would allow voters to bypass the various logistical challenges of voting by mail or at the polls, and also make it easier to avoid Election Day crowds while the pandemic has raised fears about traditional in-person voting. If those counties get their plans off the ground, more than 2.5 million Pennsylvania voters will have the option of visiting a new county election office to cast a ballot in person before Nov. 3. “These mail-in voting centers allow us to reach a group of people who either won’t vote if they don’t feel safe going to a polling place because of the coronavirus or … they won’t vote because they’re uncomfortable voting by mail,” said Delaware County Councilmember Christine Reuther. “They want that sense of voting in person. This is really about trying to maximize access, trying to maximize safety when voting.” Chester County said it has no plans to follow suit. Allegheny County, home to Pittsburgh, has yet to make a decision.

Unlike traditional early voting, in which people use voting machines the same way they would at polling places on Election Day, [Pennsylvania’s method uses mail ballots](#). Under [a new Pennsylvania law enacted last year](#), any voter is allowed to vote by mail. And in addition to requesting a ballot online or through a form in the mail, voters in any county can go to their county election office and request a mail ballot that is printed and given to them there. They can then fill out the ballot and return it immediately.

While the law makes this option available at all county election offices, it may not be feasible for one office to handle a large number of voters, especially in more populous cities and suburbs. So the Pennsylvania Department of State, which oversees elections, has encouraged counties to set up the satellite offices, including in areas that historically see low turnout or long lines.

But the implementation of a new voting method comes as officials struggle to pull off one of the most difficult elections in memory. The coronavirus has affected virtually all elements of election administration, including an increase in mail ballot requests that has far exceeded what was expected under the new law. So most counties don’t plan to tout the ballot-on-demand option to voters or to set up satellite sites.

There can be significant technical and logistical hurdles to setting up additional offices. They have to securely connect to the state’s voter registration system, keep a supply of blank ballots or correctly and quickly print there, ensure that ballots are kept secure, and have enough trained staff to process voters and troubleshoot problems. “It’s much different from just hiring a couple temps and saying, ‘Here’s a computer and here’s a ballot thing, have fun.’ You have to train people,” said Nick Custodio, a deputy Philadelphia city commissioner who helps run elections.

Officials in several small- and medium-sized counties said they were not exploring the possibility of setting up satellite offices, citing the financial and logistical challenges. The benefits, they said, may not be worth the costs compared with larger, denser counties. Custodio said Philadelphia’s satellite offices would cost more than \$100,000 each to equip and run — meaning it would cost more than \$1.5 million for the 15 locations the city commissioners are hoping to set up in addition to their existing two offices. “It’s not like you just pop a tent and get it there, because then you just create yourself a backdoor into the state’s voter registration system,” Custodio said. “So you still want to make sure that [you do] all of these things you’re doing to maintain your security against bad actors.”

Other counties have it easier. “Bucks County is fortunate: We have government service centers that already brick-and-mortar exist,” said Gail Humphrey, the county’s chief clerk. “The infrastructure’s already there, I just need to throw a server, a human, and a printer in it.” Similarly, Reuther said, Delaware County’s already approved sites will be in government buildings with existing infrastructure. A third location is still being planned. The county is also considering a unique pop-up method in which staff would set up equipment in locations such as schools, libraries, and community centers. They would be

available by appointment. "The areas of the county we would be targeting are areas where we saw either low utilization of mail-in voting or where people had a lot of difficulty leaving their communities to get to the polls, and I'm thinking specifically a lot of our senior communities," Reuther said.

Delaware County, like some others, is pursuing funding from nonprofit groups to supplement whatever local, state, and federal money will be available. Before the pandemic, Montgomery County had planned to set up on-demand mail voting in the main elections office in Norristown for the primary, said Lee Soltysiak, the county's chief operating officer and chief clerk. Now he's trying to set up the Norristown office and four others.

The four satellite offices are likely to be available only on weekends, Soltysiak said, because the buildings are in use during the week and wouldn't have enough space to allow for social distancing. "Pennsylvania finally started to catch up with the times to make more of these voting options available," Soltysiak said. "And I think it's incumbent upon all of us as election officials to make them available." — *Philadelphia Inquirer*

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The 2020 John Walson Jr. Golf for Kids' Sake, presented by **Service Electric Cable TV & Communications**, is only a month away. The mission of this popular event – an annual fundraiser benefitting Big Brothers Big Sisters of the Lehigh Valley – is to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth. This year's John Walson Jr. Golf for Kids' Sake is Monday, September 14 at the Woodstone Country Club and Lodge in Danielsville, Northampton County. [Click here for registration and sponsorship info.](#)

