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U.S. broadband doesn't get a full connection

by [Manuel Baigorri](#)

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WASHINGTON -- Living on a Navajo reservation in New Mexico, Sorraine Hot has no electricity, no running water and no TV. Her home is 3.5 miles away from the closest road.

But she no longer feels isolated. Thanks to a broadband Internet connection, she now knows what happens in the rest of the world now.

“We live way out here in the reservation and we have no connection to the outside world,” said 36-year-old Hot. “[Now] it’s a whole new world for me.”

Hot works for Community Connect, the nonprofit arm of local Internet provider Sacred Wind Communications Inc. Using federal funds, her organization built a free computer training center near the city of Bloomfield, N.M., that has served more than 6,000 Navajos during the 18 months that has been running.

But they are in the minority of rural Americans.

A report last from the Pew Research Center’s Pew Internet and American Life Project, a nonpartisan group that explores the impact of the internet on the society, states that even though 55 percent of adult Americans now had broadband at home as of April, up from 47 percent last year, only 38 percent of rural Americans homes and 25 percent of low-income Americans had broadband.

The Department of Commerce earlier this year said the number of broadband lines in the U.S. has increased from 6.8 million in 2000 to 82.5 million in 2006.

In addition, a June report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, a group of 30 developed countries that promotes democracy and free markets, ranked the U.S. 15th among all nations in broadband access with fewer than 25 subscribers per 100 Americans. Denmark, the Netherlands and Switzerland led the list with more than 30 subscribers per 100 residents.

The OECD’s report also said the U.S. lags behind other countries in broadband speed and price.

“We pay more for less speed than subscribers in other countries,” according to the Alliance for Public Technology, a group of nonprofits advocating consumer access to high-speed telecommunications.

Alec Ross, an executive at One Economy Corp., a nonprofit group that delivers technology to low-income communities, said, “For the first year in history the percentage of low-income Americans that have broadband in their homes actually went down. ... That’s bizarre.” The Pew report said this year’s 25 percent home broadband access among low-income Americans was down from 28 percent last year.

Tyre Ellison, 18, of San Francisco, learned Internet skills through One Economy’s Digital Connected program. He now helps other low-income communities with basic computer skills.

“The benefits are huge,” Ellison said.

The Department of Agriculture’s Rural Development program and the Federal Communications Commission are among the federal agencies promoting broadband access because of its usefulness in improving education, public safety, economic development and health care, according to the FCC Web site. In March, Rural Development announced the awarding of a \$267 million loan to provide broadband service to 518 rural communities in 17 states.

While the U.S. government has a number of programs to foster Internet access among rural and low-income communities, Kenneth R. Peres, president of the Alliance for Public Technology, said that the country lacks a strategic approach to improving broadband access and stimulating private investment.

“There are a few fragmented programs here and there but there is no strategy that combines these programs in a comprehensive approach to broadband,” said Peres.

A bill to track broadband deployment around the country is “stuck in the Senate,” he added.

Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez said the Bush administration's broadband policies have created a "competitive environment to foster innovation and provide effective technologies."

Dr. Max E. Stachura, director of the Center for Telehealth at the Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, agreed with Peres that a universal and coherent broadband policy is needed.

Broadband helps to manage chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and asthma. “These chronic conditions require that the patient and the physician interact so that they can make adjustments for optimal care,” said Stachura. “There is a need for broadband to be ubiquitous because both the patient and the physician need to use broadband.”

Georgia is a very rural state so there are areas where there is not adequate broadband access, he said.

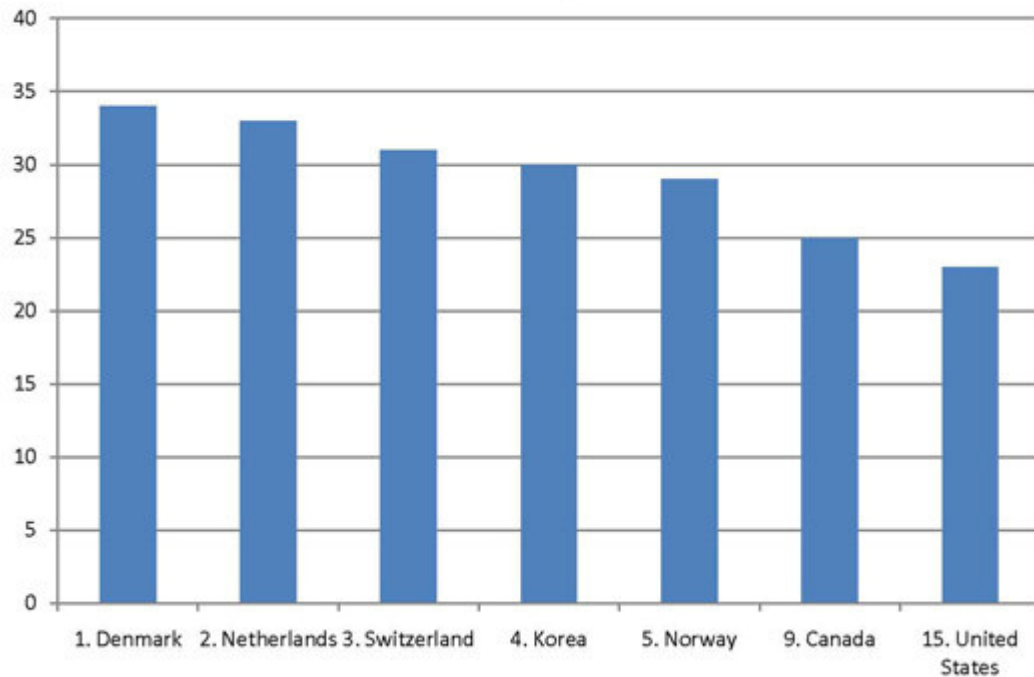
“If you move 75 miles from here [Augusta], now you suddenly don’t even have access to broadband,” Stachura said.



Courtesy of Sacred Wind Communications Community Connect

Sorraine Hot works as a coordinator at Sacred Wind Communications Community Connect in a Navajo reservation in New Mexico, where she teaches the Navajo community how to use a computer and the Internet

Broadband subscribers per 100 inhabitants



OECD/Manuel Baigorri/MNS

The U.S. ranks 15th in broadband subscribers per 100 inhabitants, says a report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

Manuel Baigorri/MNS

Sorraine Hot lives on an isolated Navajo reservation, but broadband Internet connection has changed her life

Frequently Asked Questions about Broadband

What is Broadband?

- Broadband is high-speed Internet access.

- The Federal Communications Commission defines broadband as “data transmission speeds exceeding 200 kilobits per second in at least one direction: downstream (from the Internet to the user’s computer) or upstream (from the user’s computer to the Internet).”

How is broadband different from dial-up service?

- Broadband provides higher speed and more content to be transmitted than dial-up.
- Broadband provides access to the highest quality Internet services—streaming media, phone, gaming and interactive services. Many of these services require the transfer of large amounts of data, which may not be technically possible with dial-up service.
- Broadband does not block phone lines.
- Broadband offers less delay in transmission of content.

Why is Broadband so important?

These are some of the main areas where broadband plays an important role:

- Education, Culture, & Entertainment
- Telehealth & Telemedicine
- Economic Development/E-Commerce
- Electronic Government (E-Government)
- Public Safety and Homeland Security
- Broadband Communications Services
- Communications Services for People With Disabilities

Types of Broadband connections:

Which to choose depends on whether you are located in an urban or rural area, how broadband Internet access is packaged with other services (like voice telephone and home entertainment), price and availability.

- Digital Subscriber Line (DSL)
- Cable Modem
- Fiber

- Wireless
- Satellite
- Broadband over Powerlines (BPL)

Price: From \$31.50 to \$37 a month, 4 percent cheaper than in 2005.

Sources: <http://www.fcc.gov/> and Pew/Internet Home Broadband Adoption 2008