

Broadband's Cost Gives Non-Subscribers Pause, Poll Finds

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Even if high-speed Internet service was available to the entire nation, about one-third of Americans not currently using broadband still wouldn't because of the expense, according to a report released yesterday by the Pew Internet & American Life Project.

The report was based on two surveys of 4,254 people last year and illustrates a potential hang-up in [President Obama's](#) goal to bring broadband Internet to rural and other underserved areas: If they build it, it's not clear that people will come.

"There are multiple reasons why people don't have broadband, and the hope is that if you are a policymaker you would take away from this report that a focus on availability and price will only get you part of the way there," said John Horrigan, an associate director of research at the Pew project and author of the report.

Access to computers and the difficulty of using the technology are also barriers to widespread broadband use, the report said.

Obama has made broadband deployment part of his goal to create 3 million jobs amid a spiraling economy. He also has made building more broadband networks part of his initiative to "build a 21st century economy" where small businesses in rural areas can compete globally and schoolchildren across the country have access to the fastest and best Internet technology.

Yet to solve the problems of the nation's digital divide -- the technological, educational and income gap between people in rural and low-income areas who do not have access to high-speed Internet service and others who do -- may require getting people to use broadband once they have access, according to the survey.

About 57 percent of the nation uses broadband services, even though 91 percent of homes have access.

As Congress wrangles over details of a stimulus plan that would create jobs through the deployment of broadband networks, public interest groups are pushing for specific proposals that would reduce prices for users and create programs for training and access.

According to the survey, 13 percent of non-users said they don't use the Internet or e-mail because they can't access broadband. Nine percent of those surveyed said they find e-mail and the Internet too difficult to use, 7 percent said they are too busy or don't have time, and 4 percent said they don't have access to a computer.

For those with dial-up Internet access, 35 percent said prices for broadband -- which average \$34.50 a month -- would have to go down for them to upgrade to high-speed cable, fiber-optic, or DSL Internet service, according to the survey.

"The problem with price has to do with competition," said Andrew Schwartzman, president of public access group Media Access Project. Schwartzman said that users are typically forced to choose between two to three options for high-speed Internet service.

The nonprofit group One Economy has urged lawmakers to include provisions in a stimulus plan that would renovate public housing so that all units in a building would have access to a shared data network, thereby reducing monthly costs per home by several dollars a month.

Rey Ramsey, chief executive of One Economy, said prices of about \$10 or less per month is the threshold for greater adoption.

"My biggest concern is that we not only focus on access, but we also focus on affordability and adoption," Ramsey said.