



ATC Communications Digital Inclusion Plan

February 2023

Goal Statement or Vision Statement

ATC Communications is a rural broadband service provider and understands the uniqueness of rural Nebraska Communities. This unique lifestyle is proliferated with a spirit of neighborhood, community, and trust. However, challenges do emerge such as access to services urban communities may take for granted. As a broadband provider, ATC is singularly capable of closing the gap for rural communities by offering reliable modern high speed internet services, and making them affordable for all members of the community.

Broadband Availability

Computer and Internet Use	Furnas County, Nebraska	Nebraska
Households with a computer, percent, 2017-2021	85.4%	92.8%
Households with a broadband Internet subscription, percent, 2017-2021	75.1%	87.3%

source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/furnascountynebraska,NE/IPE120221>

Broadband availability in Furnas County, specifically the City of Arapahoe, is a vital issue for the community. Disparate Technologies are leveraged by ATC Communications. Fixed wireless, DSL, and Fiber are offered to bring equitable connectivity to every household. 477 and BDC data from June 30, 2022, do not paint a complete picture of the service availability.

BDC reporting in its first-round shows promise in reducing the inaccuracy inherent to the 477-reporting mechanism. Providers can report on a location specific basis. This was a big challenge for the technicians and engineers reporting this information. In many cases to meet the deadline, estimations had to be made.

Months later with the bulk of the data collected, location by location network integrity checks put the spotlight on specific areas that do not meet the engineering estimations assumed in the initial reporting round. Active services were checked against the data submitted and 20 percent of the homes in Arapahoe do not meet the estimations. Approximately 56 specific locations within the community have less than 100 DL 20 UL available. To contrast, a fiber to the home project was completed in 2020 in the southeastern portion of the community. This equalized internet access and exceeds the standards for broadband service availability in each location.

ATC has proven the only inclusive and future proof broadband investment is fiber. This technology has virtually unlimited bandwidth. It can replace existing technologies whose capacity is exhausted. For the locations within the project area, the gap in modern service availability will be closed.

512 CEDAR ST
ARAPAHOE, NE 68922
Status: Served | Residential | Unit Count: 1

Broadband

Type: Residential
Technology: Any Technology
Speed: 25/3 Mbps or greater
Data As Of: Jun 30, 2022 (Last Updated: 2/1/23)

Residential | Business | Availability Challenge 2

Provider	Technology	Down (Mbps)	Up (Mbps)	Chall.
▶ Arapahoe Telephone Company	Copper	200	40	
▶ Arapahoe Telephone Company	Licensed Fixed Wireless	50	5	
▶ Hughes Network Systems, LLC	GSO Satellite	25	3	
▶ NE Colorado Cellular, Inc.	Licensed Fixed Wireless	25	3	1
▶ Space Exploration Holdings, LLC	NGSO Satellite	350	40	

Map Legend
● Coverage available
○ Coverage not available

Community Involvement

ATC Communications and the City of Arapahoe worked together during the COVID Pandemic to complete a fiber to the home project administered by the NDED in 2020-2021. The city council, unanimously voted to support ATC's efforts to bridge a gap in accessibility to the homes and business in Arapahoe's Southeast Quadrant.

ATC will again approach the City's leadership to explain the goals of the Capital Projects Fund by highlighting the homes and businesses in the community where current broadband offerings are limited. Rate-reach limitations in existing xDSL infrastructure are primary reasons for the shortfalls.

The COVID Pandemic response, including school location closures, put intense demand on ATC's broadband network. Many homes that had no fixed broadband access were installed and provided no charge service for several months to enable schooling from home, remote work, and home healthcare access which became common during those months. Even when schools returned to in-house service in the fall of 2020, public school processes changed. Younger students are being provided with suitable computer devices to complete their homework in digital format and paper copies of homework may be no longer accepted. Similar expectations were arranged for those who's employers could accept a work-from-home environment, and many people choose to try Tele-health or accept remote health monitoring services for the first time. Each subtle change compounded demand and set expectations to a new level for broadband access.

Addressed in detail in the following section is the concern of affordability for all households. ATC offers access to Lifeline Assistance and the Affordable Connectivity Program. The current rate for 100 Mbps symmetrical service is \$49.95 per month. Those qualifying for ACP can receive a \$30.00 cost subsidy. Those qualifying customers will receive an additional discount of \$10.00, reducing the total price for services to \$9.95 monthly. Details below will further demonstrate the need in the community for services at the lowest possible price point.

The concerns outlined in this document will be made apparent to community leadership including the city council, city employees, community business leaders, and public-school officials during appearances at council meetings and through direct mail or personal contact.

Broadband Affordability

Broadband Access in Nebraska is generally affordable when available. Most providers offer a broadband package sufficient for residential subscribers in a package that totals below 50.00 per month or 600.00 per year. Roughly 3% of the monthly income of lower income households (example 18k per year household income). A much smaller percentage for the average income household (1.2 % of a median home).

However, percentages and averages do not tell the real story. Every dollar counts for families at or near the poverty level. Consider the income demographic in Furnas County.

Income & Poverty	Furnas County, Nebraska	Nebraska
Median household income (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021	\$57,284	\$66,644
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021	\$30,457	\$35,189
Persons in poverty, percent	11.9%	10.8%

source: <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/furnascountynebraska,NE/IPE120221>

If we simply look at the estimated percentage of homes at poverty level for the given project in Arapahoe, Nebraska: Roughly 58 homes could not perceive of the extra cost associated with a “fixed” internet service of any type. Some tough it out anyway, “the kids need it”, and others forego the burden.

Federal and State assistance exists for these cases:

- *USAC (Universal Services Administration Company) offers assistance to qualifying individuals to reduce the monthly service fees for broadband subscription by subsidizing one service per household.*
- *Nebraska’s Public Service Commission offers additional support if they qualify for the federal subsidy.*
- *Affordable Connectivity Program supplements the cost of broadband services in many cases.*

Discount Program Accessibility:

- *Federal and State subsidy programs may be difficult to find, even with an online search.*
- *Social workers may assist eligible applicants in enrollment.*
- *Service providers may have trained staff that assist customers with assistance programs.*

However, most service providers do not offer discounted service beyond these programs. The programs alone may not be enough. The nation’s largest service providers have options for low-income households, but these providers have zero focus on rural communities in Nebraska. ATC Communications will echo the initiative of the large providers with a program to provide a discounted high speed internet service for those who need it most.

Actions, Strategies and Programs

Strategies and Programs that help those who don't have broadband at home

Existing Programs and Resources that Can Be Leveraged

- Universal Services Administration Company – Lifeline Program + Nebraska PSC Contribution
- Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP)
- Public Internet access at Public Library or Privately owned facilities with public internet access.

New Strategies, Actions and Programs to help those who don't have broadband at home

- ATC Communications Direct Discount – ATC will offer a reduced cost service plan.
 - When a potential customer qualifies for USAC Lifeline assistance
 - When a potential customer qualifies for Affordable Connectivity Program
 - Supplies enrollment verification for the following programs:
 - Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)
 - Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
 - Veterans Pension and Survivors Benefits
 - Federal Public Housing Assistance (FPHA)
 - Medicaid
 - National School Lunch Program (NSLP)
- Public WiFi Accessibility at indoor or outdoor locations designated by the City Council.
 - Examples
 - Outdoor Community Space / City Park
 - Indoor/Outdoor – Arapahoe Public Library
 - Indoor Only – Community Center

Summary

ATC Communications in collaboration with the City of Arapahoe will close the digital divide that segregates individuals in this community. All homes and businesses in the project area will have access to high-speed broadband services on a greenfield network that has the future of broadband access in mind from conception. This proposal seeks to include residents by offering premium connectivity for each location, low-cost service options for those in need, and public access to the service with no service requirement.