



The Daily Dish

# Does the Infrastructure Package Help Bridge the Digital Divide?

JENNIFER HUDDLESTON | AUGUST 3, 2021

Over the last 17 or so months, many of us have grown to appreciate exactly how important high-speed internet is to be able to work, learn, or keep connected to friends and family. With this increased recognition of high-speed internet's importance, policymakers on both sides of the aisle and at many different levels of government are seeking to ensure all Americans can be connected. As a result, the recently introduced [\\$1 trillion infrastructure bill includes \\$65 billion](#) in funding to help build a different kind of bridge, a bridge over the digital divide.

Recently, [I wrote](#) about some of the broadband expansion policies being considered, as well as pitfalls to avoid when policymakers are addressing these concerns. In examining new broadband expansion proposals, policymakers should continue to work with the private sector in ways that further their success in building our robust internet infrastructure. They should also target incentives towards those currently un- or under-served communities rather than engage in costly programs such as government-owned networks that could deter the private investment and innovation needed to further expand connectivity. Similarly, policymakers should seek to first address those communities that are unserved before providing incentives that could misdirect resources to communities that already have connectivity.

The good news is the recently introduced infrastructure bill avoids some of the most significant pitfalls of previous proposals. For example, it provides for updated mapping, which would help make certain that resources are directed to the areas where they are most needed, and it would prioritize those truly unconnected areas. The bill also avoids requirements for 100 mbps upload speeds included in some other proposals; such a policy would limit the technologies that could provide service and could have misdirected resources to those areas that already have sufficient connectivity.

Of course, there will still be more to do to address the digital divide, including questions related to adoption rather than access. The infrastructure plan focuses on access to service and addressing those for whom cost is a barrier, while the reasons behind a lack of adoption vary, including a [need for devices](#) or [not understanding of the internet's benefits](#).

While Americans are returning to offices and schools in many parts of the country, the importance of a strong, secure, and resilient internet infrastructure has never been clearer. Exciting and important applications of existing technologies such as telemedicine require a strong internet infrastructure, as will emerging technologies such as virtual reality and autonomous vehicles. To expand and build on this strength, policymakers should continue to enable innovation and investment and address the specific concerns of communities that are un- or under-connected.