

Broadband & Digital Equity Local Action Plan

Asotin County



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Introduction/State of the County

Overview: Asotin County, established in 1883, is in the farthest southeastern corner of Washington, bounded on the east by Idaho and on the south by Oregon. There are 626.08 square miles in Asotin County; it ranks 34th of 39 counties in land mass. In 2020, the census indicated there were 35 persons per square mile.

The elevations in Asotin County range from 801 feet above sea level where it meets the Snake and Clearwater Rivers to 6,180 feet at the peak of Ray Ridge in the Umatilla National Forest. Clarkston, at the far northeastern corner of the county, is situated at the confluence of the Snake and Clearwater rivers. Directly across the Snake River is the city of Lewiston, ID. The Lewis-Clark Valley is considered the “Gateway to Hells Canyon” which is the deepest river gorge in North America. Because of this diversity in terrain, implementing high speed broadband infrastructure is expensive and complicated. Frequent wildland fires in the county exacerbates these difficulties. To the north of Asotin County across the Snake River is Whitman County. Most of our broadband access is through connection with the infrastructure in Whitman County.

The density, of course, is not even across the county and while limited incorporated areas might merely be referred to as “rural”, many parts of the county are “extremely rural,” “remote,” or even “frontier.” As discussed below, those residents in the more remote part of the county will be able to access high speed internet only at a very high cost per household.

Table 1: Asotin County Demographics

Population: 22,285 ¹	Households (HH): 9,287 ²
People under 18: 20.2%	HH with computer: 94.5%
People 65+ years: 24.4%	HH with broadband: 86.4%
People under 65 with a disability: 13.1%	Median HH income: \$57,263
Veterans: 8.7%	Persons in poverty: 13.9%

Asotin County has low racial diversity, with 92.5% of residents reporting as White. The median mortgage is \$1,381, and the median gross rent is \$856. 91.5% of students graduate high school, and 23.7% hold a Bachelor’s degree or higher.

In the 1950s, agriculture dominated Asotin County’s economy. While diversification has occurred since then, agricultural employment continues to play an oversized role regarding the overall

¹ 2020 Census Bureau

² US Census Bureau Asotin County QuickFacts

contribution to the county's economic well-being beyond covered employment. (WA State Employment Security Dept.)

The largest industry in Asotin County is health care and social assistance, making up 25% of total employment. Retail trade is the second largest at 18.6%. And governmental administration makes up 17.2% of total employment. Workers over the age of 55 held 25% of employment. Workers 35-44 held 20.4% of employment, and workers 25-34 held 20.3% of employment. Men held 44.6% of the jobs, and women held 55.4%. Average annual wage (as compared to household income) is \$43,407³.

Asotin County has been historically economically depressed, and its growth rate is a fraction of that occurring elsewhere in the state⁴. The highest concentration of residents occurs within the Clarkston city limits, which includes census tract #9603. This census tract is recognized as an opportunity zone because of its historic economic distress. It and neighboring census tract #9604 have the significant disadvantages, according to the Asotin Broadband and Digital Equity Map created by NOANET using various sources of data. See details under Broadband Basemap later in this report.

Previous Broadband Planning: This study is a living document, building upon a previous broadband planning study completed in 2013. Broadband planning is not new to Asotin County; nor is community collaboration in addressing digital divide challenges. Champions have long been identified in both rolling out infrastructure and addressing the technology needs/gaps. The following table discusses both initial recommendations and progress made in the last decade.

Table 2: 2013 Recommendations and Progress to Date

2013 Recommendation	Progress to date
1. Continue to engage stakeholders	23 entities signed letters in support of the Port's first application for assistance for Broadband Planning in 2012; the community members have informally communicated, but in late 2020, the Asotin County Broadband Action Team formed, with assistance from the current Washington State Broadband office. They have been meeting regularly since.
2a. Work with residents to help them understand "relevance" and increase their capacity for use	This expressed the initial concept of what we understand as "digital navigators"; the Asotin County Library has continuously been making technical assistance available for over a decade.
2b. Perform deeper analysis of portions of Census Tracts 9603 and 9604 to better understand infrastructure, hardware and affordability barriers.	Analysis was completed, funding assistance was secured, and the Port is presently constructing fiber-to-the-home projects in the specifically named sections of the two census tracts.

³ WA State Employment Security Dept.

⁴ From 2010 to 2021, Asotin County's population grew 3.6%. For the same period, Washington State's growth was 15.1%. (US Census Bureau Quickfacts)

3a. Encourage competition between ISPs to address "affordability"	The Port of Clarkston invested in the dark fiber leasing model and presently leases fiber to 10 different ISPs (ones which are not an incumbent local exchange carrier (ILEC)).
3b. Engage local, regional & state Gov't to assist in solutions to infrastructure challenges.	The Port of Clarkston became a major infrastructure champion, making continuous dark fiber investments since 2013; the Asotin County Library has been leasing hotspots and providing technical assistance in the form of digital navigators who make visits to disadvantaged populations.
4. Assure that long-term infrastructure solutions have long-term capacity.	Significant investments have been made using fiber optics to create infrastructure that can handle ever faster speeds for use now and decades into the future.
5. Seek funding assistance to meet infrastructure build-out goals.	The Port of Clarkston has secured resources from USDA Rural Development, WA Commerce (CERB 3 awards; Public Works Board 2 awards), and the Library has secured resources through the WA Broadband Office.
6. Leverage First Response resources	This recommendation did not progress, given federal FirstNet award to nation-wide companies who were not interested in customized local solutions.

As shown above, progress has been made especially with regard to increased competition and lower pricing for high speed connections due to increased ISP options. All progress should be celebrated, because an element beyond the control of partners within the jurisdiction is a moving target: the definition of what constitutes high speeds has changed from 4 Mbps DL/1 Mbps UL to 100/20⁵. However, the key finding in 2013 still stands: “Barriers do exist to high speed internet adoption...in the form of affordability, capacity and lack of options between internet service providers.” This planning effort provides the opportunity to identify and continue to address barriers.

Open Access Dark Fiber Model: The biggest change evolving since 2013 is the Port of Clarkston’s infrastructure investment in the dark fiber model. NTIA/BTOP resources were used to create a redundant loop through the State of Washington, and part of that loop came through Asotin County, near the west boundary of Clarkston. The Port has created open access from the point-of-presence and built backbone within both incorporated cities in the county (Clarkston and Asotin). Further, the Port has developed relationships with ten Internet Service Providers (ISPs) who lease and light the dark fiber, providing services within the community. In 2020, the Port was successful in connecting the two incorporated cities within the county with open access dark fiber.. More recently, the Port secured resources to fill in around the backbone and is building fiber-to-the-home in three locations; the first of the three just achieved substantial completion. Two of those three locations address some, but not all, of the needs discussed above as to census tracts #9603 and #9604. It will be necessary to secure outside resources to continue to address the unserved and underserved populations within Asotin County.

⁵ 100/20 is NTIA definition for service; below 25/3 is unserved, below 100/20 is underserved. The State of Washington has a legislative goals of 1 gigabyte symmetrical to all anchor institutions by 2026 and 150 symmetrical to businesses and residences by 2028.

Planning Starting Point: Unlike perhaps other counties in Washington, Asotin County is not starting from scratch in examining broadband needs. Understanding and building on previous accomplishments leverages past investment. Community values identified in the 2013 plan are an integral part of this plan.

MISSION: Achieve affordable high-speed (broadband) internet access equitably for all Asotin County residents and businesses, using technologies that have a long-term capacity to carry data.

VISION: The Asotin County Broadband Action Team was formed in order to identify areas of our communities impacted by the digital divide and to address the factors causing that divide. We seek to ensure access to affordable, high-speed internet for all Asotin County residents, businesses and public safety services regardless of location and ability to pay.

VALUES: High speed connectivity for everyone, open access to make efficient use of deployment resources and physical rights-of-way, high capacity, long-term viable infrastructure solutions (typically fiber optic cable) that will not become obsolete in the short term.⁶

⁶ The goal is to deploy fiber optic cable as a preferred technology to serve the population well into the future. It is however recognized that cost per household could be impossible in remote connections. Therefore, the preference if fiber is not available is fixed wireless. Please note: the topography of the county makes wireless impractical in many areas. Also, we find that unlicensed fixed wireless is over-subscribed, creating limitations to such a degree that improvements in speeds may not be possible even with new investment.

Abstract

Broadband Infrastructure

Areas of greatest need: Availability of affordable high speed internet depend upon two things: a) where you live⁷ and b) continuation of federal programs such as the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) to assist less affluent households. Areas of greatest need in Asotin County include: 1) the remainder of Census Tract 9603 within the Clarkston incorporated city limits and 2) outside incorporated areas of the cities of Asotin and Clarkston.⁸ Emergency services and fire suppression are significantly impacted by poor connectivity in the southern ¾ of the county.

Unserved/underserved locations and/or areas: Unserved/underserved locations and/or areas continue to exist throughout the county, whether residents are in the incorporated communities, immediately outside them, in mostly rural areas and especially in remote, extremely rural areas where the terrain can best be described as “hostile.” (See discussion as to elevation changes in the second paragraph under Introduction—a barrier to many mechanisms for service delivery.)

Previous successes: Investments by the Port of Clarkston in open access fiber optic cable for lease have occurred subsequent to completion of the 2013 Broadband Plan. As mentioned elsewhere, the Port currently leases its dark fiber to 10 different internet service providers, demonstrating a successful public/private partnership. The open access dark fiber leasing model results in competition, which helps keep connectivity costs low. It also minimizes the capital investment that ISPs must make in order to provide service. Lastly, the open access model minimizes the number of conduits public rights-of-way must accommodate.

Objectives identified in the 2013 plan have been steadily addressed, although the work is not complete (see more discussion in the next section below). The Port has secured local, state and federal resources in growing its approximate 25 miles of fiber within Asotin County. The Port is wrapping up its first fiber-to-the-home project in northwest Clarkston Heights and has two additional projects underway within the Clarkston City limits and Census Tract 9604.

Key partners: Port of Clarkston, all ten partner ISPs but in particular Inland Cellular and First Step Internet, Asotin County, Avista Utilities, TDS Telecom, and Centurylink/Lumen, along with the Washington Department of Commerce.

Project areas, cost estimates/funding needed, ranking if needed: Projects are ranked in this order:

⁷ According to a 12-22-22 report by InvestigateWest, there is a disparity in access to digital data. Where a person lives makes a big difference in the U.S.

⁸ Asotin County is estimated to have 636.21 square miles. The only incorporated areas are Clarkston and Asotin. Since the City of Clarkston incorporated land area is 2.01 square miles and the City of Asotin is 1.05 of a square mile, that leaves 99.5% of the county outside incorporated areas.

Project I - continue fiber-to-the-home connections within census tract 9603 (primarily Parkway Elementary School service area)⁹

Project II - middle-mile in rural Asotin County (partial goal—service *community anchor institutions*—CAIs— that are presently unserved):

- Middle Mile fiber construction, Part A: within Highway 129 Right of Way, connecting Asotin to Anatone Community Center;
- Middle Mile fiber construction, Part B: along Highway 129 right-of-way, south from Anatone Community Center to the Oregon border;
- Middle Mile fiber construction, Part C: from Asotin to the intersection of Back Road and Cloverland Road.

Project III - redundant loop starting with Port of Clarkston-owned fiber on 6th Avenue near Evans Road enclosing Peola Road, Silcott/Chief Timothy, Highway 12, back to Evans Road, and possibly to the point-of-presence near the Red Wolf Bridge.

Project IV - continue fiber-to-the-home projects in Clarkston Heights, going south and east, including along Highway 129 between Scenic Loop to Asotin (Clemans Addition, Quail Ridge & more).

Additional projects in Asotin County

- Analyze additional areas needing open access dark fiber infrastructure investment based on digital equity and affordability challenges and continue new fiber-to-the-home projects where possible and sustainable;¹⁰
- Assure redundancy of open access fiber throughout the county;
- Partner with ISPs to identify key hybrid fiber/wireless solutions to assure some level of connectivity throughout the county—the next step building on middle mile projects;
- Work with local government entities and utilities creating trenches within the rights-of-way to get conduit placed at low cost;
- Develop a partnership with WSDOT to place conduit and/or fiber in state highway rights-of-way, with specific emphasis on Highway 129.

Obstacles: The biggest obstacles to better broadband service in the county include the extreme rural nature of the county (resulting in a very high per passing cost for sparsely populated areas), lack of local matching funds, and the substantial elevation changes occurring throughout the county, limiting options, and forested lands prone to forest fires. An even more substantial barrier, however, is the lack of knowledgeable, affordable human resources. Existing local governments cannot simply add one or two staff members (for example, if the Port of Clarkston were to add two staff, that would grow their FTE by 36%). The Asotin County Library has brought substantial

⁹ This ranked high from a digital equity perspective.

¹⁰ Per the recommendations in the Rapid Design Study: “Unlike some communities the options for Asotin [County] boil down to open option. Get as much fiber installed which can be funded by grants.”

human resources to the BAT coordination and this planning effort; these are not dedicated positions, and even the digital navigator funding is short-term. To apply for and manage federal grants will take significant resources. Typically, grant funding does not provide reimbursement for these expenditures—and that's presuming the grant is awarded. Loans, requiring payback of capital, is further constraining on small local government entities.

A perfect grant program requiring affordable or supplemented match may go un-tapped simply because an appropriate sponsoring entity may not have the human resources to apply. (Regional or statewide consortiums might be a part of the solution.)

Immediate next steps: ACBAT will work with ISPs serving the county to refine the results of the Rapid Design Study and develop project areas for funding application submissions via BEAD and other NOFOs. In addition, areas of limited or no redundancy will be examined for future solutions.

Digital Equity

- **Areas of greatest need:** Remote unincorporated towns and areas, such as Anatone, lack internet access and digital equity services.
- **Populations with greatest need:** People 65 years of age and older, low-income individuals and families, people living with disabilities, and rural residents living in south Asotin County.
- **Most prominent barriers to digital equity among the covered populations:** Lack of available resources such as assistance for the sustainability of the Digital Navigator program and the federal Affordable Connectivity Plan (ACP). Also, improvements in coordination of services from multiple community agencies will provide benefits.
- **Most prominent barriers to the successful provision of digital inclusion services:** A permanent funding source is needed for delivery of Digital Navigator services and for promotion to increase awareness of the services offered. There is a need for resource to expand when demand continues to increase. Lack of operational funding and funding opportunities are significant barriers at this time.
- **Next steps:** Make the case for continued future funding for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) or like program through federal and state appropriations. Leverage immediately available resources and service through community partnerships.

Broadband Infrastructure Summary

Broadband Base Map Review

The map in Figure 1, shows household locations and speed tests for Asotin County.¹¹ The brown circles represent households. Black dots represent no service at all; red - very low speeds; yellow - download speeds between 10 and 25 Mbps, and light green - download speeds between 25 and 500. No tests exceeded 500 Mbps, and none approached 1 Gbps download. A pattern identified in 2013 continues to hold true for more recent tests as well: Even when download speeds approach speeds fast enough to be defined as “broadband,” upload speeds severely lag behind the goals. Dots on the map below are assigned only as to download speeds.

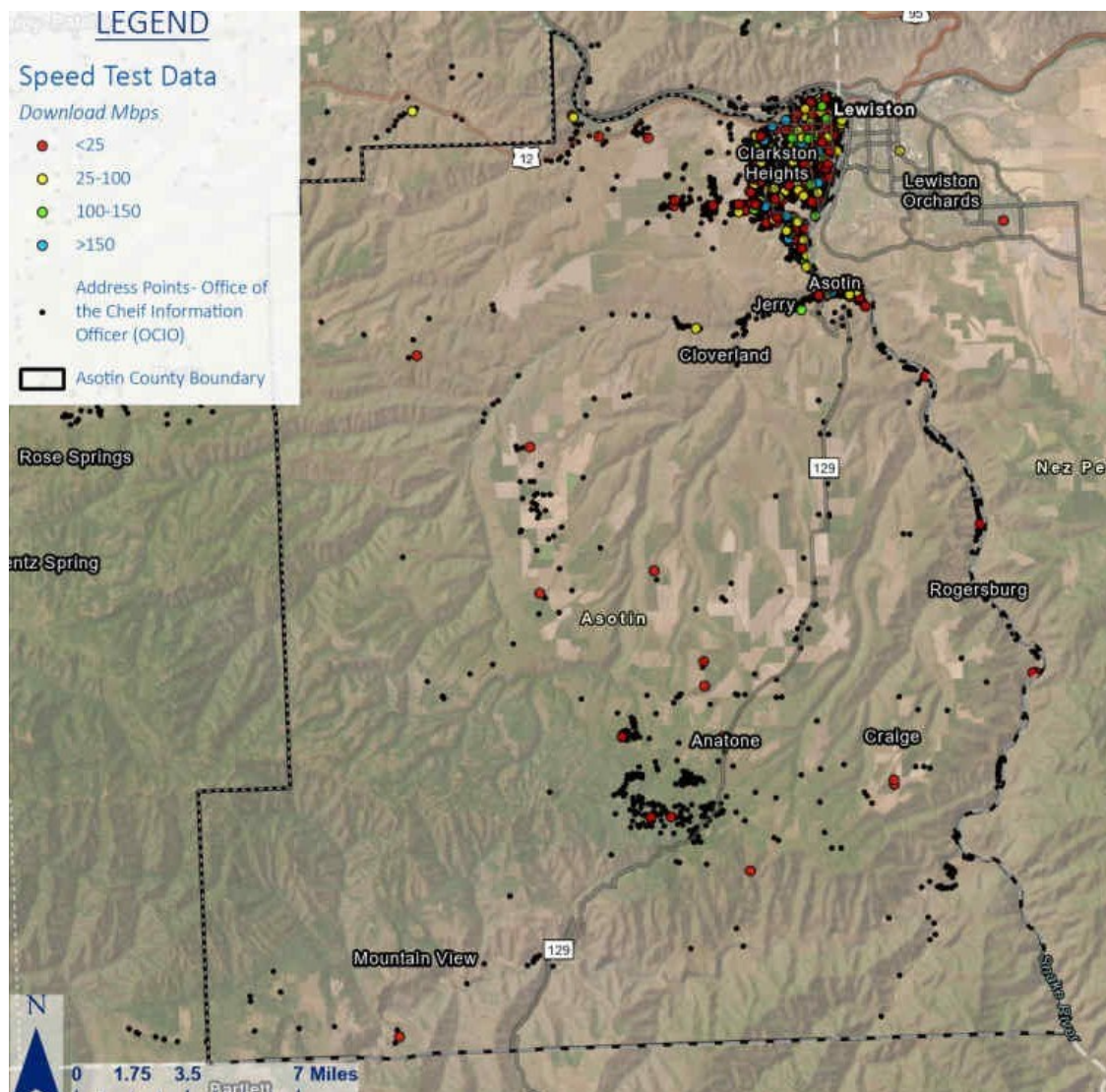


Figure 1. WA State Broadband Office Speed Test, Asotin County, November 2022

¹¹ Data source: Washington State Broadband Office Speed Test Results, as of 11-2022.

While it would be helpful to have had more speed tests in the analysis, ACBAT concurs with this conclusion from the Rapid Design Study: Significant housing clusters in the county outside the incorporated areas are unserved or underserved. This is consistent with regional results in that larger towns achieve reliable internet services; where there is sparser population that is less true. Affordability remains an issue especially in larger towns, in the older neighborhoods, as discussed below.

Section A of Asotin County—Census Tracts 9603 and 9604: As discussed earlier, portions of Census Tracts 9603¹² and 9604—identified with unique challenges in the 2013 planning study—continue to face unique challenges, per a review of the Broadband Base Map created by NOANET. These unique characteristics which put them at a disadvantage are:

- Ookla and Washington State Broadband Office speed tests are fairly consistently at or below 25/3;
- The highest percentage of households with the percentage of residents below the poverty level at greater than 15%;
- Some of the highest percentages of households without internet access (census tract #9604 at the highest in the county at over 16%, and census tract #9603 between 14 and 16%) are within Census Tracts 9603 and 9604;
- Census Tract 9603 recognized as a Low-Income Community Opportunity Zone and has been long recognized as a Historically Underutilized Business Zone (HUB Zone);
- Some of the highest percentages of households in the county without a computer occur here;
- A ranking of “high” or “very high” Digital Divide Access per analysis by Purdue;
- The highest unemployment rates in the county, in excess of 9%;
- The lowest median income in the county of between \$35,000 and \$45,000 per household;
- Some of the highest percentages within Asotin County of disabled population starting at 17 and exceeding 20% in places;
- The highest percentage of minority population within Asotin County at greater than 10%;
- The highest percentage of population ESL within Asotin County at .5%;
- Meets the CDC definition of Social Vulnerability; and,
- Have the highest subscription to the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) within Asotin County at greater than 2% of the population.

The following map shows the geographical location within Census Tract 9603 affiliated with Parkway Elementary School as discussed elsewhere in this report. It is fully within the city limits of Clarkston.

¹² A portion of Census Tract 9603 appears in Figure 2.

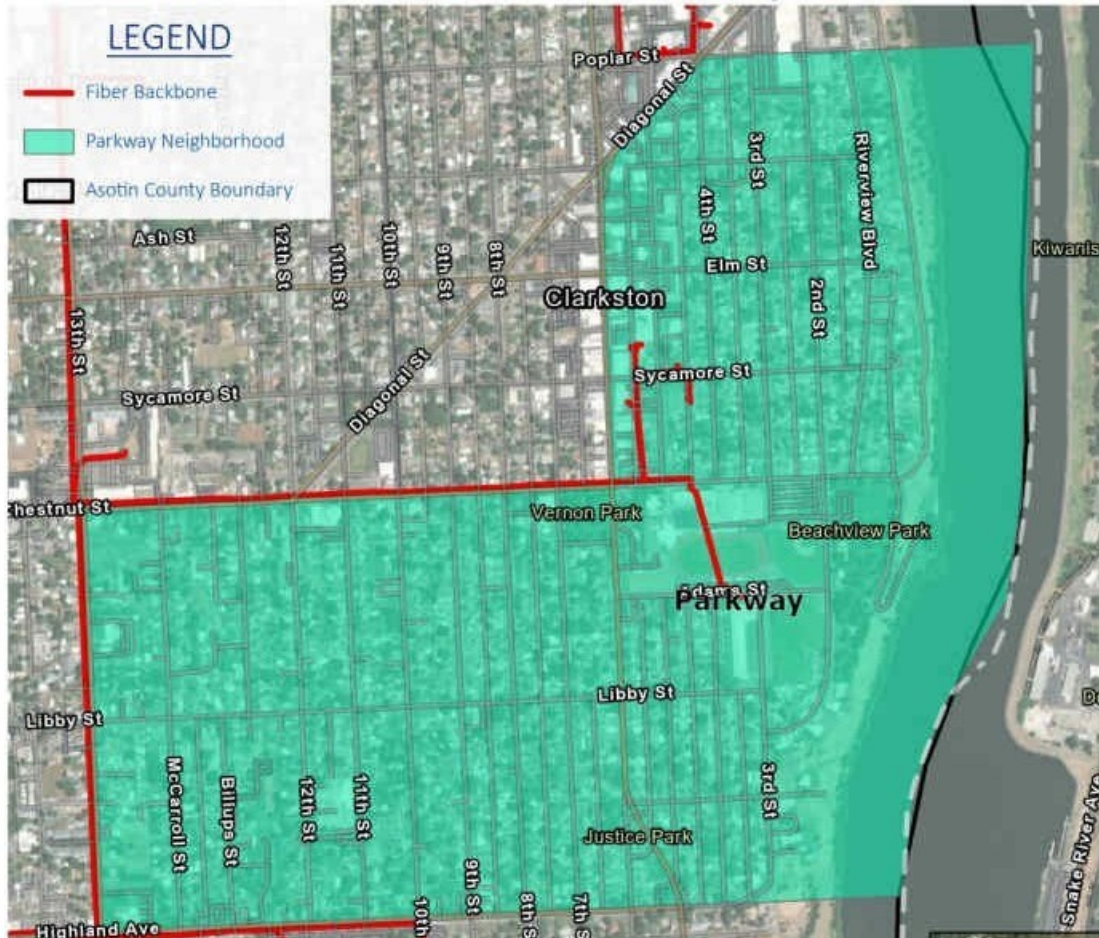


Figure 2: Parkway Neighborhood, Asotin County

Section B–Clarkston Heights: There are several logical extensions south of the Port’s West Clarkston Heights Fiber-to-the-Home project, including some developments serving residents 55 and older.

Section C–Peola Road Area¹³: This area is west of the Asotin County landfill. Residents have spoken with the Port about needing better service. Although there are not many speed tests from that area, those that have occurred show it as an underserved area.

Section D–Silcott/Chief Timothy area: This area was identified in the Rapid Design Study for a potential project. There are mixed results from speed tests.

Section E–elsewhere in the county: The concentration of population and services are located in a very small part of the county in the northeast corner. As discussed above, concentration of services and the availability of options exist in the populated .5% of Asotin County, with 99.5%

¹³ It is possible to combine the needs of Sections B & C, which did result in Project IV below.

being extremely rural, with such extremes in elevation that the Rapid Design Study termed the terrain “hostile.”

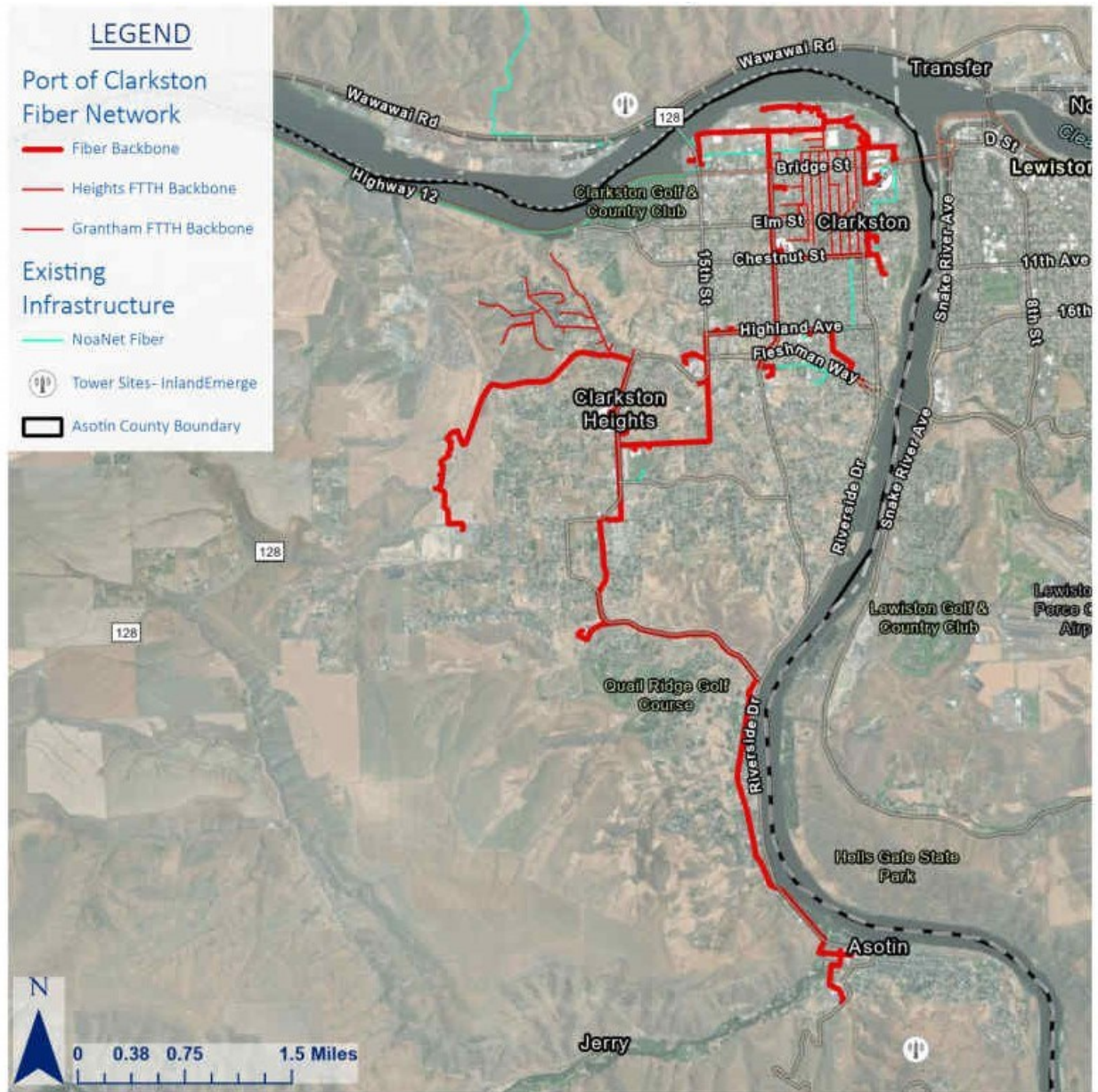


Figure 3: Existing Infrastructure, Asotin County

The data is limited in this map, with only the Port of Clarkston and Inland Cellular shown here. **NOANET** also provides lit services (not dark fiber leasing) and appears in Figure 4. TDS Telecom infrastructure is shown in Figure 5.

Incumbents, of course, have provided services. Below is a map showing the areas of responsibility assigned to CenturyLink/Lumen and TDS Telecom.

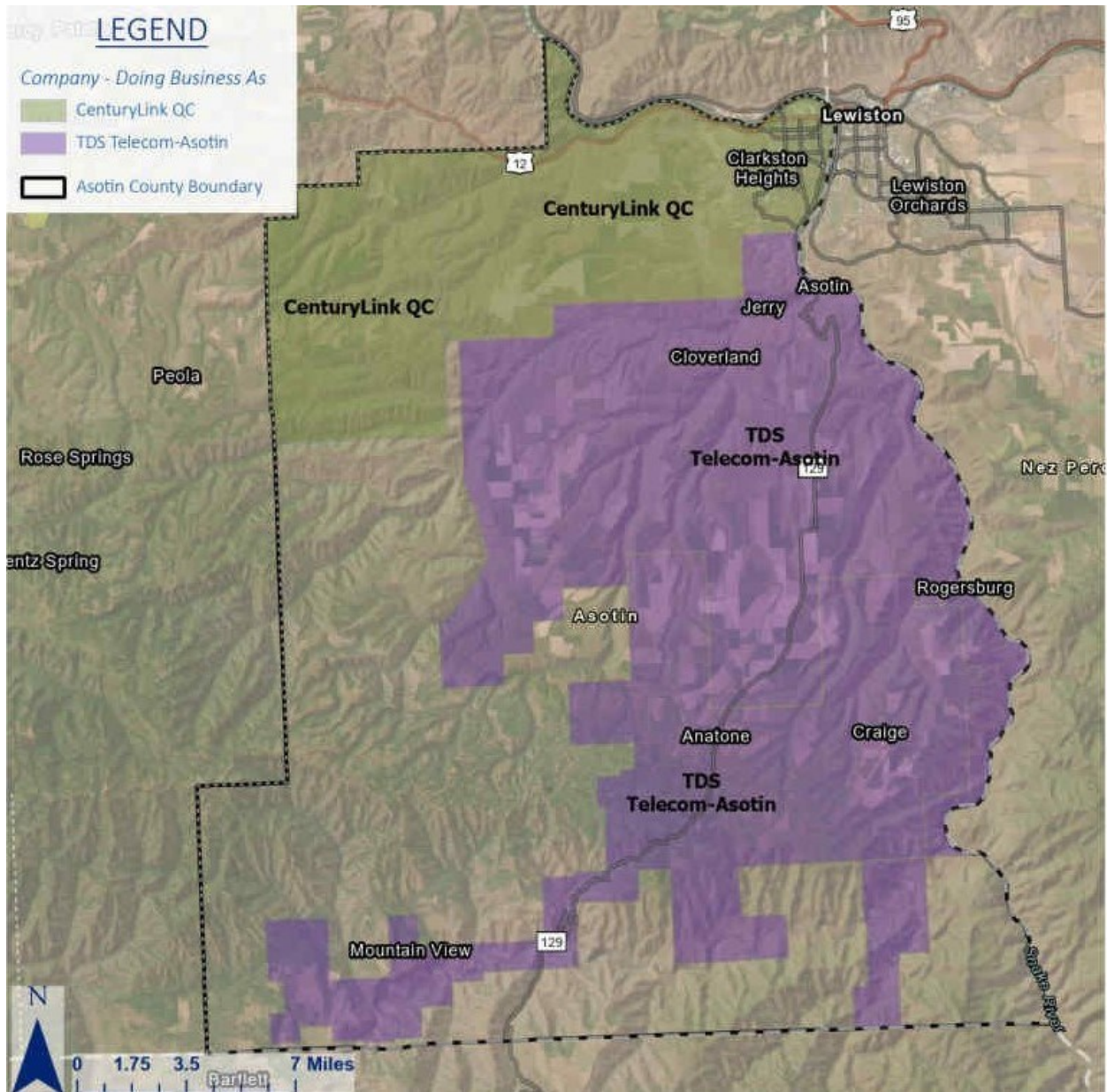


Figure 4: UTC Incumbent Local Exchange Carrier Boundaries, Asotin County

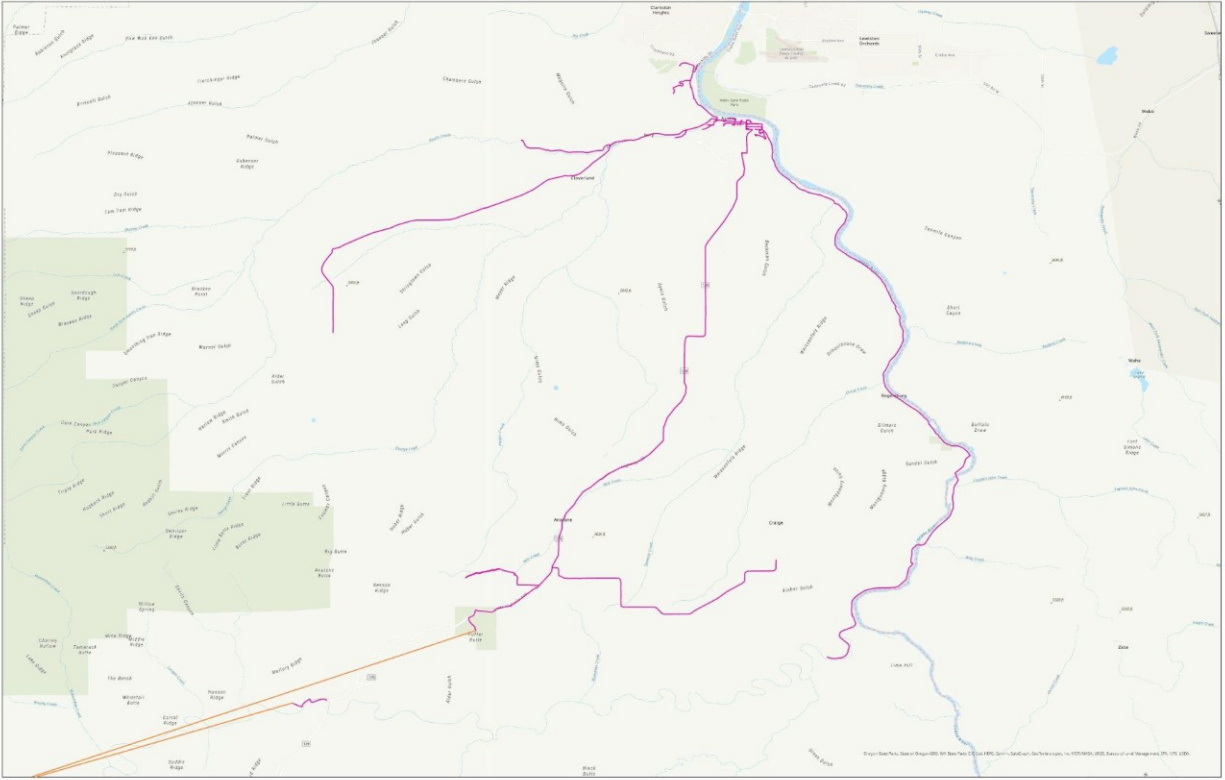


Figure 5: TDS Telecom Infrastructure Map, Asotin County of infrastructure.

Purple is fiber optic cable; orange is microwave. Note that TDS explains, “Some of the fiber is currently only being used for internal use (fiber feed DSAs), but could be used for customers.”

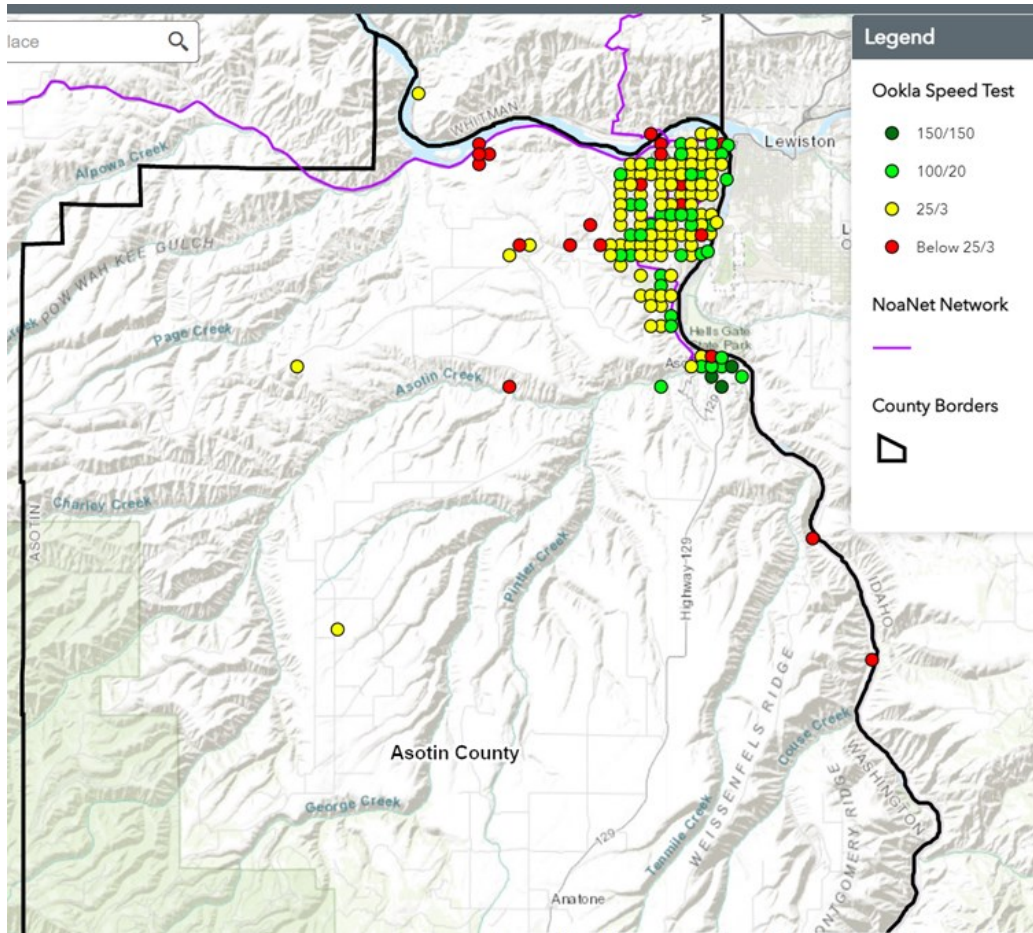


Figure 6: Ookla Speed Test, Asotin County

Ookla speed tests are perhaps more recent, as they show very high speeds in the city of Asotin. TDS Telecom very recently completed a fiber-to-the-home project in the city of Asotin (it was the first one completed.) NOANET’s fiber line (in purple) is shown on the Ookla speed test map.

Local Broadband Asset Inventory

Organizations Currently Serving Our Community with Broadband Assets

Table 3: Community Organizations with Broadband Assets

Entity	Assets
Port of Clarkston	Open access dark fiber (for lease), conduit
Open access fiber owned by NOANET	Open access fiber, lit as prescribed by tenant; long-haul fiber along Highway 12
Internet Service Providers willing to compete to provide services	
Public school districts	Existing network

Incorporated towns/cities	Water towers, streetlights, ROW
Asotin County Library	wifi, hot spots
Asotin County	ROW, roads, bridges
Lewis-Clark Terminal	tall structure
Various entities	Cell towers
Avista Utilities	Utility poles
Centurylink/Lumen	Utility poles, existing closed access network
TDS Telecom	Utility poles, existing closed access network
Sparklight (formerly Cableone)	Existing closed access network
WS DOT	ROW, roads, conduit
Walla Walla Community College	Existing network

Upcoming Projects That May Allow for Conduit/fiber/Infrastructure Placement

To date, the partnerships that have been identified that are necessary for future growth of infrastructure involve the Port of Clarkston and Internet Service Providers (ISPs). By signing on as committed partners, two ISPs assisted in helping secure fiber-to-the-home funding, and a third ISP began leasing dark fiber from the Port as a result of those projects.

These are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of what could be accomplished to maximize the benefit of resources. These following strategies have been identified:

- Partner with ISPs to identify key hybrid fiber/wireless solutions to assure some level of connectivity throughout the county—the next step building on middle mile projects;
- Work with local government entities and utilities creating trenches within the rights-of-way to get conduit placed at low cost;
- Develop a partnership with WSDOT to place conduit and/or fiber in state highway rights-of-way, with specific emphasis on Highway 129.

Community Anchor Institutions

Table 4: Community Anchor Institutions

Institution	Current Speeds	Current Provider
Asotin County Library, downtown Clarkston location*	90.28 down / 83.42 up	K-20
Asotin County Library, Heights location*		
Clarkston School District*		FatBeam
Asotin Anatone School District	414.75 down	K-20

Tri-State Memorial Hospital	181.15 / 57.81	Lumen
Clarkston Police Department*		
City of Asotin Police Department	44.459 down/12.184 up	Sparklight
Asotin County Sheriff*		First Step Internet
Clarkston Fire Department*	29.39 down/94.84 up 10ms .09%	First Step Internet
Asotin County Fire District #1*		First Step Internet
Blue Mountain Fire District	not yet served; in construction	
Asotin County Community Services*		
Quality Behavioral Health		
CHAS		
Asotin County Public Housing Authority		
Walla Walla Community College*	1 gigabyte symmetrical	K-20
Evergreen Estates	185.73 down/ 176.57up	Lumen
Asotin County*		First Step Internet
City of Asotin	44.459 down/12.184 up	Sparklight
City of Clarkston		
Veterans Outreach Center	85.00 down/12.11 up	
Field Springs State Park		
DSHS		
Asotin County PUD*	222.97 down/194/52up 9ms 10.70	
Asotin County Landfill*		First Step Internet
Asotin County Fairgrounds*		First Step Internet
Asotin County Shop*		First Step Internet
Child Protective Services		
Anatone Community Center	no connectivity	
Senior Centers (2)	little or no connectivity	

*Connected by dark fiber optic cable through the Port of Clarkston; speeds dependent on choices, not infrastructure limitations.

Internet Service Providers

Table 5: Internet Service Providers

ISP	Contact	Notes
First Step Internet	Joe Savoy/Kevin Owen	cell & internet offerings, ACP participant
Inland Cellular	Aaron Westgate	cell & internet offerings, ACP participant
Rodeo Internet/TV	Jarel Pittman	TV & internet offerings, ACP participant
TDS Telecom	Gail Long	Phone & Internet offerings, ACP participant
Sparklight (formerly Cableone)	Dave Mapes	Cable offerings, also phone & internet, ACP

Pocket iNet	Todd Brandenburg	Internet
SyringaNet	Bill Cole	Internet
StarTouch	Dawn	Internet
NOANET	Chris Walker	Internet
Wholesail Network/ZiPLY	Gabriela Springer	Internet
CenturyLink/Lumen		Internet, Telephone
Idaho Regional Network		Internet
Hells Canyon Wifi	Todd Clovis	wifi
Via Sat		satellite
HughesNet		satellite
Starlink		satellite
T-Mobile		Phone & Internet offerings, ACP participant
Fatbeam		Internet
Neubeam		Internet

Organizations providing data for our community broadband map and speeds/pricing: The following provided information to populate our community broadband map:

- **NOANET**
- Break Point Solutions (from the Rapid Design Study)
- ISPs (see list in previous section)
- Community Anchor Institutions (see list in previous section)
- Businesses within Asotin County
- Residents of Asotin County
- Petrichor, LLC
- Washington State Broadband Office
- WSU Extension
- Individual members of ACBAT

Broadband Infrastructure Needs Assessment

Community Anchor Institutions That Need Improved Services or Where Cost of Services is Too High

Many of the anchor institutions, where the infrastructure is available, are dialing back on service delivery, due to affordability. For instance, the Asotin County Library is the one location that residents without internet can count on for access. It tested at 90 Mbps download and 83 Mbps upload. For the kind of demand on the library's connectivity, 1 Gbps symmetrical is necessary.

Other anchor institutions in the remote part of the county have few options in which delivery speeds meet the definition of “broadband.”

The County is fortunate in that in 2021 when fiber backbone connected the two incorporated cities, a number of anchor institutions were able to connect using that technology. (Many of these were associated with county services and/or included fire and police.) Higher speeds are possible, but at a cost that is difficult to justify, given that there are so many locations that feed into service delivery.

Community centers, even those such as Valley Senior Center, have limited budgets for connectivity. Thus far, all but one,¹⁴ have not been located within fiber-to-the-home (FTTH) projects being constructed; individual connections using open access dark fiber are expensive when not part of FTTH projects.

Four community anchor institutions (CAIs) are of particular concern. All are located in the south $\frac{3}{4}$ of the county where there is little service. Those include Field Springs State Park, Anatone Community Center, the new Blue Mountain Fire Station (undergoing construction), and the new Fish and Wildlife services area at Boggan Basin/the nearby restaurant gathering point. All need connectivity to assist in fire suppression as well as serving the communities. The concept, initially, while awaiting direct connectivity is to connect these CAIs so that nearby unserved residents can use hot spots (borrowed from the library) to achieve connectivity.

Areas Lacking Broadband

In 2013, it was recognized that many residents did not view the investment in internet connectivity as “relevant.” Costs were high then, for much slower speeds than are available today. However, with the coronavirus forcing dependence on the internet, in addition to more and more governmental services requiring digital interaction, connectivity is clearly needed. Those who have choices make the decision for a lower degree of connectivity, based on price. The on-going need for high speeds is recognized today.

The most severe barriers to connectivity is along Highway 129 south of Asotin. Not only is there little connectivity meeting the definition of broadband in this territory, but there is also a dearth of cell service and emergency services connectivity. This contributes to lack of public safety relating to weather calamities, forest fires, traffic accidents and more.

As for Census Tract 9603, (see discussion above) there is a good case for the need for fiber-to-the-home, especially for small residences built in the 1930s and 40s that are frequently occupied

¹⁴ The one referenced—planned within the Port’s FTTH project for Census Tract 960—is the Veterans Center, but deployment to that location will not be complete until late 2024.

by tenants. However, affordability is a key factor for access (see discussion in section immediately below).

Please see additional discussion of the areas of need under “Broadband Base Map Review.” These then connect to projects listed

Areas Where Cost May Be Too High for the Average Household

Affordability is an issue throughout the county, whether you are a resident, a business owner, a non-profit or a governmental entity. Asotin County is not an affluent county. The median household income is \$57,263 (WA State average \$85,863, national average \$74,592), and 13.9% of residents are living in poverty. (US Census Bureau Asotin County QuickFacts.) This puts a \$75/month (plus tax) bill for connectivity out of reach for most.

For those living in the south-of-Asotin extremely rural/hostile terrain portion of the county (whether income is less than or exceeds median household incomes listed above), satellite delivery is an option. But it is also very expensive, and the geographical area to be served is not the most affluent in the county. Also, satellite service is not deemed reliable, and the more households that are on it, the lower the speeds that can be achieved. Therefore, it is essential that ACP, or a similar program, be made available beyond current appropriations.

Obstacles and Barriers to Broadband Deployment

Challenges to Broadband Deployment

More middle-mile open access investment needs to be made before last mile connectivity can occur.

Financial Gaps Preventing Dark Fiber Open Access Infrastructure Investment

- Returns on investment are so low as to require the sponsoring entity to set aside decisions based on business cases; a “green-lighted” project likely has an altruistic component, because few are truly sustainable on their own;
- Lack of grant funding resources, particularly if the project is kept deliberately small due to the size of the local jurisdiction and what it can manage either in match or management;
- Smaller awards have a higher administration to benefit ratio that larger projects, but larger projects can be out of reach due to match;

- Cash flow for small municipalities becomes a major concern with larger projects; the ability to pay \$10 million on a reimbursement basis¹⁵ when the municipality has only \$1 - 1.5 million in reserves puts the entity at financial risk, especially if any of the award has to be returned to the federal/state agency;
- Loan funding, such as that available through USDA RUS, is so complicated that the application process must be hired out, for the sponsoring entity to affirm that the project is even financially feasible, and these costs are not recoverable for municipalities;
- Lack of local match funds for dark fiber open access investments;
- Lack of population density creates high cost per passing;
- Materials cost much more and the supply is oversubscribed, thus requiring much advance notice/planning;
- Policies on pole contact fees are shifting costs to project sponsors with the work performed by the utility companies expensive and slow to be accomplished (partially a workforce issue);
- Insurance costs and long-term affordability of maintenance and repair/replacement;
- Cost of cell tower leases or sites for placement of cell towers;
- Staffing/talent—given that for municipalities, this type of utility is new:
 - Subject matter experts are difficult to find for support to existing staff;
 - New permanent staff are difficult to justify, and if justified, difficult to obtain and retain in remote rural areas;
 - Those with institutional knowledge are retiring;
 - The technology and marketplace are constantly changing, requiring on-going education that is not readily available;
 - The cost to prepare grant applications, in the hope of receiving funds which do not have to be paid back, is prohibitive, done as part of a larger gamble, and frequently, not rewarded; nor is it reimbursable if funding is received;
 - Project management skills (on staff or in a consulting role) are expensive and difficult to obtain in small rural areas;
 - Grant and loan administration—particularly for projects involving federal money—is a heavy lift for existing staff;
 - Some supplementation to existing staff is both necessary and expensive (and seldom covered by grants/loans);
 - Availability of staff/consultants after the grant closed, to assist with audits is sometimes a barrier.

¹⁵ The practical situation is that by the time paperwork is compiled, the first request for reimbursement to the funding agency under a grant/loan is 45 days from receipt of the invoice. Agencies take variable amounts of time to make payments on requests for reimbursement, but certainly if the reimbursement occurs, that's streamlined processing. If additional documentation for the expenditure is needed, months could be added before reimbursement is received. Even in the optimal situation for timing on reimbursement, if the construction firm is billing monthly, a second payment is due weeks before the first reimbursement is received.

Workforce Gaps

Planning/partnering workforce

To be successful, it will take a village, or a lot of partners (ACBAT), many of whom have key personnel already committed to other projects. It will be difficult for the various entities making up the ACBAT to continue to participate once the major planning efforts are complete, because ACBAT is an add-on responsibility, and not a primary reason for employment.

Sponsoring entity workforce

See “staffing/talent” discussion immediately above in “Financial gaps preventing infrastructure investment.” In summary, those with the depth and breadth of knowledge needed for an on-going successful program are difficult to come by in remote rural areas.

Project design workforce

Specialized knowledge and specific training with the utilities within the project’s jurisdiction is necessary even for an experienced designer. There is difficulty finding a broadband design consultant within the immediate area.

Construction workforce

There are construction shortages in many states, particularly those with experience in broadband deployment. While that is mostly accurate in our region, there is one firm across the river in Lewiston, Idaho, that has performed broadband construction for most of the utility companies and the Port of Clarkston. The firm has been able to take advantage of apprenticeship programs to expand the work crew, but the firm is unable to expand to address the increasing demand¹⁶ due to labor shortages.

Policy Barriers

- Zoning issues for towers (restrictive or underdeveloped)
- ISP challenge process does not hold ISPs accountable
- Open access discourages ISPs from building in some areas
- Lack of standardized/streamlined processes for permitting and make ready

Community Awareness Issues

- Expanding awareness of ISPs offerings/options;

¹⁶ The Fiber Broadband Association, an industry group, estimates that more than 205,000 new jobs will need to be created to complete the BEAD broadband expansion plans, which have a four-year timeline for construction. Note: there are additional construction demands independent of the BEAD program.

- Eligibility and advantages of the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), who qualifies, and how/where to enroll or get help to enroll
- General awareness by residents of the benefits of being online for various activities
- Addressing privacy and cybersecurity anxieties

Geographic and Environmental Issues

- The hostile terrain with severe elevation changes (North America's deepest river gorge) makes construction of high speed broadband expensive and complicated;
- The prevalence of forest or wildland fires limits aerial distribution in places;
- Underlying basalt rock formations are not conducive to underground fiber or pole installation;
- Steps to assure protection of cultural assets can slow or halt projects.

Potential Paths Forward

Planned Expansion Areas

- City limits of Clarkston and the lower elevation areas immediately outside the city limits (including the Parkway Elementary School Service Area);
- Better connectivity for developments along Snake River Road between Clarkston and Asotin;
- The Clarkston Heights area, particularly developments serving residents age 55+;
- All areas south of Asotin, including:
 - the unincorporated community of Anatone, located in (and including) the southern portion of the county with the goal of serving CAIs and,
 - the unincorporated area of Cloverland.
- The Silcott area west of Clarkston along Highway 12.

Specific projects are ranked in this order:

Project I - continue fiber-to-the-home connections within census tract 9603 (primarily Parkway Elementary School service area)

Project II - middle-mile in rural Asotin County:

- Middle Mile fiber construction, Part A: within Highway 129 Right of Way, connecting Asotin to Anatone Community Center;
- Middle Mile fiber construction, Part B: along Highway 129 right-of-way, south from Anatone Community Center to the Oregon border;
- Middle Mile fiber construction, Part D: from Asotin to the intersection of Back Road and Cloverland Road.

Project III - redundant loop starting with Port of Clarkston-owned fiber on 6th Avenue near Evans Road enclosing Peola Road, Silcott, Highway 12, back to Evans Road, and possibly to the point-of-presence near the Red Wolf Bridge.

Project IV - continue fiber-to-the-home projects in Clarkston Heights, going south and east, including along Highway 129 between Scenic Loop to Asotin (Clemans Addition, Quail Ridge & more).

Additional projects in Asotin County

- Analyze additional areas needing open access dark fiber infrastructure investment based on digital equity and affordability challenges and continue new fiber-to-the-home projects where possible and sustainable;¹⁷
- Assure redundancy of open access fiber throughout the county;
- Partner with ISPs to identify key hybrid fiber/wireless solutions to assure some level of connectivity throughout the county—the next step building on middle mile projects;
- Work with local government entities and utilities creating trenches within the rights-of-way to get conduit placed at low cost;
- Develop a partnership with WSDOT to place conduit/fiber in state highway rights-of-way, with specific emphasis on Highway 129.

Possible Funding Sources

It is essential that state and/or federal funding continues to be available through grants with low local match requirements, in order for these projects to happen.

The federal grants can be from typical funding programs, including BEAD and NTIA. Also, though, other agencies may have programs that assist in achieving goals in common with these infrastructure needs (USDA Rural Development, Department of Homeland Security and more).

Local Leadership

The following are anticipated to be actively involved: Asotin County Library, Port of Clarkston, Asotin County Commission, Asotin/Anatone School District, Clarkston School District, Walla Walla Community College and over 30 other members of ACBAT including many ISPs. ACBAT will continue to meet and consult with stakeholders and residents. In this way, decision-making will accurately reflect the needs of Asotin County.

¹⁷ Per the recommendations in the Rapid Design Study: “Unlike some communities the options for Asotin [County] boil down to open option. Get as much fiber installed which can be funded by grants.]

Workforce Solutions

- Limited internal staff/resources issue: Regional or statewide consortiums need to be formed in order to submit grant/loan applications (particularly under BEAD).
- Subject matter expert issue including construction workers: Work with other counties/entities, WSU Extension, Washington Public Ports Association, WSBO and other for:
 - Clearing house for pool of qualified consultants;
 - Training for existing staff for municipalities, community champions & more;
 - Training for ACBAT and other community volunteers to keep up on technology;
 - Greater ease in accessing and marketing apprenticeship programs.

Policy Solutions

- State assistance to create consortiums of counties/local governments/other applicants as regions to contribute to single grant/loan applications where resources are shared and administrative burdens are lessened;
- Solving for cash flow on reimbursement-only awards that exceed the applicant's reserves by an order of magnitude (e.g. tenfold);
- Seek additional easy-to-streamline project administrative processes to make them more efficient with the goals of relieving the burden on small, rural municipal staff, and reduce waiting and processing times;
- Accountability, financial, and (if necessary) enforcement for the ISP challenge process;
- Creation of a state insurance fund to help counties that do not have the tax base to fund maintenance and repairs, especially recovery relating to windstorm or wildfire damage.

Upcoming Municipal Projects & Conduit Placement

Municipal Projects

- Northwest Clarkston Heights Fiber-to-the-Home project, to be online in July 2023;
- Grantham Elementary School Service Area Fiber-to-the-Home project, construction beginning July 2023;
- Census Tract 9604 Fiber-to-the-Home project, design nearing completion; make-ready construction beginning June 2023;
- Redundancy planning.

Conduit Placement

Groundwork/partnership needs developed such that when utilities and local public works projects have trenches open, evaluation of placement of conduit can be performed (and implemented if beneficial) before construction can occur.

Digital Equity Summary

Demographic Base Map Review

Public Data Does/does Not Accurately Reflect Population Characteristics

While most of the data provided does accurately reflect population characteristics within the cities of Clarkston and Asotin, unincorporated areas such as Anatone, Cloverland, Jerry, Rogersburg, and Silcott are not represented on the map. These unincorporated areas may serve as hubs for nearby rural residents, and may have some sort of community center, firehouse, or church to serve for gatherings and information sharing.

Poverty is high within Clarkston census tracts, and over 20% of homes are without computers and/or internet service. Rural residents outside of Clarkston are more likely to have a computer, however this can be attributed to rural residents having larger incomes (legacy farmers and/or retirees), hence better access to devices and service options.

Areas That Appear to Lack Digital Equity Resources

All areas in Asotin County will be without digital equity resources when Digital Navigator resources and ACP funding expire/run out. Presently, most areas outside of the Clarkston and Asotin city limits lack any sort of resources for digital equity. Specific areas include the Anatone and other areas in the south; the Silcott area to the west; and the rural population out past the Clarkston Heights area on Peola Road.

Covered Populations That Are Prevalent in Community

Populations that are most prevalent in Asotin County include seniors (people ages 65 and up), low-income individuals and families, veterans, and those with disabilities. The Base Map provided by NOANET does an accurate job highlighting seniors and income level; however, it does not provide sufficient detail to develop specific programs or emphases.

Local Layers Added to the Base Map

Internet Service Provider (ISP) responses were low, with only Inland Cellular providing information. Most report at a State level, and did not share information with us on the county BAT level. Nine of the twenty-four anchor institutions reported speed data. Variances in speeds are due to the need and function of each institution. The Base Map provides an accurate assessment at a broad level.

Digital Equity Inventory

Organizations Currently Serving with Digital Equity (DE) Services

Table 6: Community Organization Highlighted DE Services

Organization	Highlighted Services
Asotin County Library	Provides Digital Navigator services and classes, hotspot lending.
Tri-State Memorial Hospital	Provides translation, mobility, visual and audio services support for patients and visitors for accessing internet within facilities.
Walla Walla Community College	Provides digital navigator services to students.
Clarkston & Asotin/Anatone School Districts	Provides some equipment; also clearing house information
Veterans Outreach Center	Collaborates with the library to get digital navigator services to veterans at the center.

Upcoming Events or Projects That Could Support Efforts

- Senior Internet Class, Clarkston Community Center, TBD, open to seniors and families/caretakers, seniors are given help and education on using and navigating the internet, student volunteers can provide 1:1 mentoring and assistance
- Patient Health Information Access Class, Tri-State Memorial Hospital, TBD, open to patients and family members/caretakers, help patients how to access and utilize patient health information on the online Patient Portal
- Job Seekers Fair, Walla Walla Community College Clarkston Campus, TBD, open to the general public, learn how to prepare a resume, submit online job applications, and use job seeking services like Northwest Market, Indeed.com, and company websites
- Asotin County Commissioners Town Hall, recurring, Asotin County Fire District, 2377 Appleside Blvd, Clarkston, WA 99403

Organizations Currently Supporting Covered Populations But Not Engaged in DE Efforts

Table 7: Suggested DE Efforts for Community Organizations

Organization	Covered Populations	Suggested DE Efforts
Asotin County Community Services	People with disabilities	Internet instructional classes, device distributions
Asotin County Fire District	General population	Communications channel
Asotin County Sheriff	General population	Internet scam and phishing awareness classes
Asotin County Public Health	General population	Communications channel
Asotin-Anatone School District	Students K-12, parents	Internet instructional classes, open computer lab time for those without access
Asotin County Public Housing Authority	General population	Communications channel
Asotin County PUD	General population	Communications channel
Asotin County Commissioners	General population	Communications channel
City of Asotin	General population	Communications channel
City of Clarkston	General population	Community course for accessing home permits online (for home buyers)
Clarkston Fire Department	General population	Communications channel
Clarkston Police Department	General population	Communications channel
Clarkston School District	Students K-12, parents	Communications channel
Blue Mountain Fire District	General population	Communications channel
Tri-State Memorial Hospital	General population	Instructional classes for patient and families on accessing Patient Health Information online
Quality Behavioral Health	General population	Communications channel
CHAS Health	General population	Communications channel
Walla Walla Community College	Post-secondary students	Communications channel
Evergreen Estates	Seniors, people with disabilities	Student-led mentoring for residents on using devices to communicate with loved ones (FaceTime, Zoom, etc.)
Veterans Outreach Center	Veterans, people with disabilities, seniors	Communications channel, hosts library's Digital Navigator 2 hours per week.
Washington State Parks	General population	Communications channel

Stonebridge Reentry Services	Formerly incarcerated people, low-income individuals and families	Instructional classes on using the internet to search for jobs; prepare resumes and applications
Worksource Clarkston	Low-income individuals and families	Instructional classes on using the internet to search for jobs; prepare resumes and applications
LC Valley Municipal / Metropolitan Planning Org.	General population	Communications channel
Valley Vision	General population	Communications channel
Port of Clarkston	General population	Communications channel
Interlink Volunteers	Seniors, people with disabilities	Communications channel

Community Engagement Resources & Spaces for Classes, Trainings, or Meetings

Table 8: Community Resources

Organization	Community Resources
Asotin County Library	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or trainings to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Assistance for Affordable Connectivity Programs enrollment, Programs to provide affordable devices, Digital Navigator Program
Asotin County Community Services	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Programs to provide affordable devices
Asotin County Fire District	Large meeting space available for public meetings regarding digital equity and broadband
Asotin County Sheriff	Information location
Asotin County Public Health	Information location
Asotin-Anatone School District	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Classes and/or trainings to support digital literacy/skills, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients)
Asotin County Public Housing Authority	Information location

Asotin County PUD	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients)
Asotin County Commissioners	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals
City of Asotin	Information location
City of Clarkston	Information location
Clarkston Fire Department	Information location
Clarkston Police Department	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals
Clarkston School District	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings
Blue Mountain Fire District	Information location
Tri-State Memorial Hospital	Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings
Quality Behavioral Health	Information location
CHAS Health	Information location
Walla Walla Community College	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Programs to support privacy and cybersecurity needs of individuals, Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients), Mobile hotspot or device lending programs, Digital Navigator Program
Evergreen Estates	Information location
Veterans Outreach Center	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Public computer workspaces, Public Wi-Fi (not including access restricted to customers or clients)
Washington State Parks	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings
Stonebridge Reentry Services	Meeting space available for classes, trainings, or meetings, Programs to provide affordable devices
Worksource Clarkston	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information, Public computer workspaces
Valley Vision	Information location
Port of Clarkston	Promote awareness of infrastructure

Interlink Volunteers	Communications channels (such as newsletter) to share digital equity information
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Digital Equity Needs Assessment

Regions That Face Barriers to Access or Lack Available DE Services

Regions within Asotin County facing barriers to access and/or lack available digital equity services include:

- City limits of Clarkston and the lower elevation areas immediately outside the city limits;
- Developments along Snake River Road between Clarkston and Asotin;
- The Clarkston Heights area, particularly developments serving residents age 55+;
- Incorporated city limits of Asotin;
- All areas south of Asotin, including a) the unincorporated community of Anatone, located in (and including) the southern portion of the county and b) the unincorporated area of Cloverland.
- The Silcott area west of Clarkston along Highway 12.

Demographics/Populations That Face Barriers or Lack Access to Digital Equity Services

Much of the community's news and available resources are posted online via news outlet webpages or social media. Those without internet access do not see or learn about programs that may assist them. This includes low-income individuals and families, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. Lack of access is due to high costs for services and devices, limited to no internet understanding, and limited accessible community resources. Many community organizations are not aware of digital equity services they could offer their target populations and would benefit from a community-wide action plan to increase awareness and availability.

Sectors That Face Barriers to Access or Lack of Available DE Services

Local government agencies run on skeleton budgets, leaving inadequate sources of funding for digital equity programs and/or support. Currently, what digital equity services exist rely on resources that will run out. Many non-profit agencies with specific focus areas tend to overlook digital equity as a potential service/need of their client base and are unaware of how they can incorporate digital equity into their policy and service areas while remaining in the scope of their organization's mission and vision.

Barriers to Digital Equity

Barriers Preventing Access, Adoption, and Use of Internet and Devices

Nearly a quarter of the residents of Asotin County are 65 years of age or older, with many never needing to access the internet prior to retirement. A fear of technology and/or looking foolish may hold some seniors back from using the internet for their news, access to their health information, and communications with family. Another barrier is lack of individual and/or household income to support internet service or more than one online device within the home.

Barriers and Gaps Preventing the Provision of Digital Equity Support Services Throughout the Region

Asotin County has only two incorporated cities, approximately five miles apart.¹⁸ The remaining 99.5% of the county consists of unincorporated communities, national and state parks, farmlands and livestock ranches, and rural residents. A lack of resources to hire staff for anchor institutions in areas located outside of Clarkston or Asotin¹⁹ is a barrier for rural residents to learn about and/or receive digital equity services.

Also, a barrier is a lack of either state or federal funding beyond July 2024²⁰ to sustain the existing Digital Navigator program, let alone expand it. Without the Affordable Connectivity Program, or its equivalent going forward, there simply is no digital equity. Conditions in Asotin County make a compelling case for continued advocacy for funding to meet our digital equity goals.

Community Awareness Issues Inhibiting Digital Equity Resources from Being Utilized

Community awareness is largely inhibited by a lack of coordinated agency communication efforts. Some organizations and agencies are not aware of how digital equity plays a role in their services, and how they and their clients could benefit. Alternatively, they may feel it is a) not their responsibility, or b) they may lack the staffing and resources to promote digital equity with their constituent group(s).

¹⁸ The cities of Asotin and Clarkston are two of the three cities within the Lewiston, ID Metropolitan Statistical Area; that short distance makes that possible.

¹⁹ Two possible locations include the Anatone Community Center and the Blue Mountain Fire District Fire Station (which is currently under construction). A third location, a restaurant located on Highway 129 on the Washington/Oregon border is a third possibility.

²⁰ Institute of Self Reliance (<https://acpdashboard.com/>)

Needs, Gaps, or Barriers in Ability to Assess the Digital Equity Landscape of Community

For areas outside of Clarkston and Asotin, the largest need is basic infrastructure in place to allow for better internet access. Providing support to disadvantaged populations where there is no connectivity is not a good use of resources, even if hot spots could be brought closer to unserved anchor institutions, such as the Anatone Community Center. Within incorporated areas (cities of Clarkston and Asotin), efforts are underway to coordinate communication channels to build upon awareness and to connect households to broadband and lessen the burden of internet costs. Resources need to continue to be allocated for this purpose going forward.

Potential Paths Forward

Possible Funding Mechanisms

It is essential that state and/or federal funding continues to be available for this very effective educational outreach—the Digital Navigator program embraced early by the Asotin County Library. A thoughtful approach to informing legislators of the benefits is needed. Ideally, state/federal resources would pay for staffing and administration oversight of the Digital Navigator.

To address low community awareness, the Asotin County BAT will collaborate with area agencies to identify the services and program areas that rely on online engagement. This would include agencies with online contact and/or registration forms, shopping channels, event sign-up forms, social media polls and bulletin boards, job applications, patient and student information online portals, and general website navigation. Grant funding from regional agencies such as the Innovia Foundation, Avista Foundation, Lewis-Clark Valley Healthcare Foundation, and the MJ Murdock Charitable Trust could be sought to cover marketing and awareness campaigns throughout the County. Meetings with local leaders could be scheduled to educate people on ways to incorporate digital equity within their agencies.

ACBAT can collaborate with local school districts to provide eligible students with tablet and keyboard devices. Devices can be obtained through grant funding, donation, and vendor discount and rebate programs.

Entities Providing Leadership in the Area of Digital Equity

Educational institutions and healthcare agencies can provide leadership in digital equity, as they already have systems in place for their target populations (students and patients). Both students and patients already can access their records via online portals, as well as schedule classes/appointments, and speak directly to their instructors/doctors. Entities such as this have processes in place to enable access for disabled populations and those without home internet access and can provide guidance on best practices. Other entities outside of anchor institutions with such knowledge and experience are banks.

Asotin County Library (ACL) has been providing Digital Navigator services since long before the Digital Navigator model was developed. ACL began drop-in hours in January 2012 for people to learn about e-readers and other devices they may have received for Christmas. This was closely followed by Tech Help which featured one-on-one appointments to learn about using devices, the internet and library resources. In 2015, ACL added free courses in Microsoft Office Suite, including certification opportunities in conjunction with a career center with a professional career coach who helped with interest inventories, job searching, resume writing, interviewing, and soft skills.²¹ That work continues to this day.

With the advent of the Digital Navigator model, ACL developed a much more robust program with two Digital Navigators working a total of 18 hours per week doing the following:

- One-on-one appointments to help people with their digital skills
- Help applying for the Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP), Lifeline and other providers discount programs
- Programs for groups including Appy Hour, which is offered monthly and focuses on apps on a particular subject, such as hiking, travel, videoconferencing, and ebook apps
- Outreach activities, including regularly scheduled hours at the Veteran's Services Center, the Senior Center and Walla Walla Community College

Digital Navigator Services are available to everyone in Asotin County, with the primary groups served being people 65 years of age and older, veterans, and those who have a lower income. Usage has gone from an average of 30 appointments per month to over 75. This is not including the approximately 100 quick tech questions that happen throughout all open hours and are handled by all staff. ACL anticipates continuing increases in usage as people become more aware of these services.

ACL has gained significant momentum with our Digital Navigator Program following the pandemic. ACL has received grant funding through a Washington State Department of Commerce grant which has allowed us to expand programming and focus on promoting our services. It is apparent that continuous promotion is necessary to get the most benefit for members of our communities. It is essential that ACL is able to acquire ongoing funding in order to sustain the program and leverage the progress ALC has already made.

Regions/Populations of High Significance for Outreach in Community

Identified regions include the Anatone and southern Asotin County region, and the Silcott region in western Asotin County, as well as continued outreach to more populated areas.

Populations in need of outreach include the senior and veteran populations.

²¹ Within six months, twenty-three clients had received job offers.

Local ISPs Interested in Digital Equity Partnerships

Inland Cellular, a locally owned and operated internet and phone service provider, is an ideal partner. In addition to Inland Cellular, FirstStep Internet and TDS have been active partners in the ACBAT. Inland Cellular and FirstStep have a proven record of being willing to cooperate on open access projects by becoming committed partners in Port of Clarkston fiber-to-the-home infrastructure projects, but also committing in dark fiber lease agreements to tapping ACP and other resources to make connectivity affordable.

The following ISPs active within Asotin County currently participate in and promote to users the Affordable Connectivity Program:

- First Step Internet
- Inland Cellular
- Rodeo TV
- Sparklight
- TDS

Upcoming Programs or Projects That Could Support Digital Equity Efforts

- Explore consortial partnerships to leverage resources and secure access to new digital equity opportunities.
- Community learning labs for seniors at the community center, with high school student volunteers.
- Asotin County Commissioners Town Hall, date and time TBD, Asotin County Fire District, 2377 Appleside Blvd, Clarkston, WA 99403
- Establish an email list for distribution of Digital Equity/Broadband news, including program promotion, Digital Navigator services at various locations, ACP, possible device distribution for eligible applicants (contingent upon grant funding and/or community support).
- Expand Digital Navigator services outside of Clarkston to more rural areas Asotin and Anatone.
- Add an additional mobile laptop lab (4-6 computers) for Digital Navigators to take to locations and/or loan to community agencies for specific programs/courses.
- Expand the number of hotspots available for loan and standardize them at Asotin County Library and Walla Walla Community College.
- Incorporate digital literacy classes across healthcare, education, and workforce development agencies.
- Develop partnerships with agencies to offer annual cybersecurity classes at the library, community college, and hospital. Training content and materials will be available on the BAT webpage.
- Expand Asotin County Library's outreach further around the county.

- Connect with a consultant to perform periodic accessibility audits at partnering community agencies. (Contingent upon supplemental funding.)
- Remain vigilant in seeking out financial and device assistance programs such as the Affordable Connectivity Program, increase community awareness of said programs, and assist eligible residents with accessing these programs.



The Digital Navigator Program, funded through grants is going strong. We have two Digital Navigators, providing services at the library and out in the community, as seen on the left at the Asotin County Veterans' Center. This valuable program cannot continue at this level without grant funds to cover Digital Navigator wages, as well as promotional costs.

