

# BROADBAND IN ALASKA: A 2020 REPORT

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## *ANCHORAGE, ALASKA*

One thing's sure about living in Alaska – sometimes we wait for the good stuff. Broadband is no exception. For clarity, let's define internet as any connection that offers speed less than 25 Mbps (megabits per second) download and 3 Mbps upload. This is more commonly called "25X3".

Broadband will be any connection that is 25X3 and faster.

Using Anchorage as our urban benchmark, most people in Southcentral Alaska enjoy fast broadband speeds and plenty of fiber throughout the area. This market has many competitors, which drives prices down and quality higher. Generally speaking, only Southcentral (on the road system) and Southeast Alaska (on the ferry system) currently have access to fiber. If you reside outside these two regions, chances are you have very expensive and slow internet.

Turning to rural Alaska, the picture suddenly gets really dark. Approximately, 40% of all Alaskans are underserved (slow and expensive internet) or unserved (no internet, no broadband). The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) 2020 Broadband Deployment Report puts that number at 34.1% for all Alaska Native villages (we believe the actual number is much higher). During the current COVID-19 pandemic, you'd think those numbers would motivate the State of Alaska, the State Legislature and advocacy groups to address the challenge and make statewide broadband deployment a priority. So far, not a word on the subject. Our community leaders are sitting on their hands.

Help is on the way. There are two privately funded rural Alaska solutions coming in 2021. Pacific Dataport is launching the first of two Aurora GEO HTS (geosynchronous high-throughput satellites) which provide an affordable broadband connection across 100% of Alaska. The second is the OneWeb System using LEO (low-earth orbit) satellites, a mega-constellation that will cover 100% of the earth's surface.

Most households will find the Aurora System GEO HTS satellites very adequate for cruising the Internet, video conferencing and checking email. The OneWeb LEO satellites easily provide the previously mentioned, but also enterprise and business applications such as latency-sensitive software, gamers wanting a competitive edge and the ability to have fiber-like connections. Low latency is a nice to have as an option – but it comes at a higher price.

The pinnacle offering from Pacific Dataport is their GEO HTS/LEO hybrid service. The hybrid option allows a business, health clinic, school or government office to have Internet access utilizing both systems in the most economical way possible. Certain tasks are assigned to the GEO HTS system (for high volume data transfer, regular use, etc.) and others are assigned to the LEO system (for low-latency software, I.T. department, etc.).

2020 taught us the value of humanity, importance of resilience, and the critical significance of a good broadband connection. While the first two can be learned, we know some can't afford basic internet and others have no internet option. Two broadband options are coming to 100% of Alaska soon. To learn more, go to [Alaska Broadband Association](#) and sign up to be notified when broadband reaches your community.

*About Shawn: Shawn Williams is the Director of Government Affairs at Pacific Dataport. As a 40-year resident of Alaska, he has a background in marketing, economics, and politics in both the public and private sectors. He earned a BA in Economics from the University of Alaska, Anchorage and an EMBA in Strategic Leadership from Alaska Pacific University.*