



[New Senate bill defines "second generation broadband"](#)

By [Nate Anderson](#) | Published: May 25, 2007 - 11:42AM CT

At a [House committee hearing last week](#), the FCC came under criticism for the methods it uses to evaluate broadband penetration in the US. Two basic complaints stood out: the fact that the FCC only gathers data by ZIP code and the fact that it defines broadband as being anything faster than 200Kbps. Now the Senate is joining the reform party, and Senate Commerce Committee chairman Daniel Inouye (D-HI) has just introduced the Broadband Data Improvement Act to remedy some of the problems.

- [House Dems: Broadband isn't broadband unless it's 2Mbps](#)
- [FCC classifies Broadband over Power Line as information service](#)
- [FCC bows to criticism, updates broadband data collection policy](#)
- [FCC proposes new wireless broadband emergency network](#)

A [staff working draft](#) of the bill (the text is not yet available from [THOMAS](#), but it should appear soon as S. 1492) contains several important changes to current FCC practice, though it does not tell the agency to define broadband as 2Mbps or higher, as some representatives wanted. Instead, the FCC is directed to establish a standard for "second generation broadband," defined as an Internet connection that can "reliably transmit full-motion, high-definition video." In its reports, the FCC will need to indicate how many lines in each district support this higher speed—a speed that will, inevitably, be referred to as "Broadband 2.0." Lower speeds will still be reported as well.

The second big change concerns the gathering of data by ZIP codes. Under current practice, if a single address in a ZIP code can receive high-speed access, the entire ZIP code is counted as "served." The new bill would require far more granular reporting by making carriers report data at the ZIP+4 level. The FCC would have to produce reports that show all geographical areas "not served by any provider of advanced telecommunications capability," and that map would look substantially different from the current, ZIP-code based one.

The bill also directs to the Comptroller General to submit a report to Congress within a year's time on the state of US broadband compared to broadband options in foreign countries. Specifically, Congress wants to know the average price per megabyte of broadband, the average actual speed of the connections, and the availability of broadband in the US compared to "other industrialized nations."

\$40 million is also set aside each year through 2012 to fund state efforts related to broadband data collection. States would have to put up 20 percent of the money and

the federal government would provide the rest. The goal is to generate detailed, state-level maps of those places where service is not available and to come up with "a tactical business plan" for fixing any problems identified. The \$40 million appropriations request seems motivated by the success of [Connect Kentucky](#), a state/business partnership for making broadband affordable and available to 100 percent of Kentucky residents by the end of this year. The group's CEO appeared before the House committee last week to a warm reception, and it looks like the Senate is also open to replicating the model in other states.

Free Press policy director Ben Scott, who also testified last week, praised the new bill, saying, "With this bill, we would finally be able to answer key questions the Federal Communications Commission has ignored for too long. We would have granular data about broadband availability, adoption, cost and speed at a local level across the country. This information is invaluable. It would help our communities realize the social and economic benefits of new technologies, faster speeds and lower prices."

A House version is expected in the near future.

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