

Q: How optimistic or not do you think residents are about soon getting better and more affordable internet?

Leader Responses (15 participants):

**In no particular order. Excerpt from one leader transcript missing because this question was largely not applicable for their community.*

(1) Broadband utility leader (Hancock County): "People do price-shop [for broadband] and some people always go for the lowest thing. And I usually tell people if I can, two things—one, even if you're not sure about it, get it to your house, try it for a month (it's free for the first month where we are), and if you decide you either don't like the capacity you have—it's too too expensive—you can always lower it down. You can also cancel it if you want, but you've got it to your house and then you can do it again later on, down the road, when you are more confident in what you want to do. But at least you've got it to the house ... Then the other one is talking to people about what you can use [broadband] for. Sometimes [people] don't realize [it can be used] for streaming services. They say 'Oh I don't stream.' I say, 'Do you use Netflix? Do you use AppleTV?' And in a lot of cases they say 'yes' and I say, 'that's streaming.' ... I think a lot of people are still sensitive about price, and needing to compare. And I think the ability to actually say what the comparison is—fifteen dollars, twenty dollars, compared to 50 to 60...It's a big difference. So, the savings in doing it through using the internet can be tremendous. ... [Also], the Affordable Connectivity Program...those sorts of things help some people get their internet for free if they qualify, and more people qualify than people realize for doing those sorts of things."

(2) Broadband committee member and island seasonal resident (Knox County): "For the year round community, the fishing season is starting and nothing else is on their radar screen. You know, they see the trucks [and] the workers on the roads and no one's complaining about it. But I don't think it's sinking in just yet. And it's gonna be some time before we actually get the service up and going fully, because we have this whole backhaul question to answer—whether we can put a cable in, and we're stuck in Army Corps of Engineers permitting right now [and] whether we have to put up a tower, which would be another delay. So, that's where we're at. It will probably be next spring before people will really be getting the gist of the service."

I think we have the benefit in that we have trucks and crews on the island already. So, people are seeing stuff happening. And we're trying to communicate [that] these are the delays ... and people know that out here it takes a long time to get stuff done...like, there's a channel that needs to be dredged for boats to get in and out periodically and that is another Army Corps of Engineers permit thing...that's been trying to be permitted for about two years now. So, people out here understand it takes a while to get things done. That's a plus."

(3) Regional broadband coalition leader (Piscataquis County): "They've heard about this for so long that they're kind of, 'well, let's wait and see.' I think they're going to be pleasantly surprised and by that I mean, we're going to see fiber everywhere in the next, probably, four years. But, if you asked people on the street, they wouldn't believe it, because they've been promised and told 'this is coming' for so long. So, the expectations are pretty low at this point. But, I'm a lot more optimistic."

So, we're dealing with that. But, people are glad to see that activity is taking place. Increasingly, people know about the Maine Connectivity Authority and the zillions of dollars available. They're doing their grants rather more slowly than I would have hoped, but okay. The grant applications...they give lots of positive weight to the people who are totally unserved, that is, all they have is at best DSL. And, I don't think they're anywhere near granting to the towns and communities that are served by

cable, as expensive and crappy as it is. So, the cable towns are going to have to wait, I think. That's a bit of an issue."

- (4) **Broadband consultant (Sagadahoc County):** "The funny thing is [there are] sort of very differing perspectives, [depending on] your lens of what this all looks like to you. We have a lot of very unhappy people that thought all of this funding and federal money meant they could all have a fiber optic connection, so they're looking to have their current provider over-built with a different company that's going to bring them fiber and have it paid for. And that's not what's going to happen. So they're very unhappy, even though they have access to broadband. And then for the places that had no options prior, they're getting ecstatic, because there's potentially light at the end of the tunnel to have something, and they don't care what form it takes, they just want a connection. If I were to say [what] the general pulse is...very optimistic in the moderate levels of rurality in Maine, you know...sort of, the fringes of the established towns. But then as you get farther out, I think you still have a very deep sort of ambivalence or weariness or just not concerned one way or the other.

That expectation piece is huge because...everybody, depending on where their community is with the planning process...even if they've been approved recently for an upcoming grant....I'm in the industry...I know how long the backlog is for materials, for crews, trucks...some of these projects could be five years out, at the end of the day. And it's just going to be an expanding window of time from start to time of completion. It's just going to keep getting wider, and it's going to be frustrating, and most of these projects are. But, at the end of the day, it'll be fine."

- (5) **Broadband committee chair (Lincoln County):** "I think at this point, if they could have it by 2024—the end of 2024—I think they'd be thrilled. I think that if we don't get into this next grant round that should be coming up in November or sometime [and we] have to wait [for] the next bunch of money from the federal government, I think it's going to be really hard."

- (6) **Selectman and broadband committee member (Lincoln County):** "[It has been helpful to] circumvent all the bureaucratic 'Mother May Is' and come up with a solution that is willing to basically take on some of that initial cost, because it's all just numbers anyway. That has allowed us to not have to go and get approval beyond the Select Board."

- (7) **Former island selectboard chair (Cumberland County):** "Well, it's interesting...my husband asked that question this morning. And I'd just been to the selectmen's meeting and heard [name redacted] give a report on where they are, and they hope to start construction in January...actually hanging the wires. And [name redacted] felt that next summer, in August, we might be up and running. I'm sure there are a lot of people that don't believe they'll ever see it in their lifetime. But, people are asking questions about, you know, 'where are we in the process?' Nobody's seen any wires being [installed]. I think until they actually see wires, they're not really going to believe it. Because it's still theoretical. Even though they're making progress...even though they've got the loans...even though they've done all of these things, until you see people up in poles, the reality is different from the verbiage."

- (8) **County economic council leader (Washington County):** That varies by community. I think that, for the unserved communities, they're very hopeful. For the communities who are considered underserved, there's not a lot of hope. Within those communities, there seems to be a lot of negative feelings about it because they're being carved out. With some of the communities I'm working with ... they've gone without for so long. And then I worked with another community that's considered underserved, and they're like 'wait a minute, these people are going to get fiber? And we're stuck with this?' And, so, you know, it's like, 'I can't help it, guys. That's the way the funding is happening. Those aren't my rules.'

- (9) **Library director (Piscataquis County):** "I think people are fairly optimistic. I know MCA just announced that there was just a big federal grant that came through. I

forget the exact numbers but it's millions upon millions of dollars. Well, I get worried about it being spent in equitable or effective ways because that's not always the case. So, I am curious to see how that is actually going to be spent. I have real problems sometimes with how some of these things work, because it seems like a lot of it works by basically throwing money at the companies that are already doing a bad job, like Consolidated or Spectrum, and saying, 'please, pretty please, build better internet access here. We would really like it if you did.' And then they will hire a consultant, which is actually part of their company, to come in and say that it's not feasible and meanwhile that costs like 500 thousand dollars. So, *laughs,* a lot of times these things end up just being eaten up by companies that don't actually produce results. There's not a lot of gauging how effective it actually is. So I get worried about that a lot. Because if these companies are already doing a bad job, why are we funneling more money to them, hoping that they'll do a better job?"

- (10) **Former selectboard chair and local farm owner (Washington County):** "I think there was a lot of hope built up ... but the problem is, I think right now, people are really feeling hopeless that it's not going to happen. I think about my dad [and] a few other people...for my dad, he got his hopes up that this was going to be better—that he could watch news without the 'circle of death' on it or whatever. Now, he's to the point where [he's thinking], 'this isn't going to happen. We're never going to have good internet service. We're never going to be able to do this.' And I think for us it was, the whole idea that we were going to have it, and now people thinking because it's been so long, that it's just not going to happen—that it was a pipe dream...it's never going to happen. I mean, I'm seeing progress. They are getting the poles up. But, I myself have concerns because now that they've waited so long, the cost is up. We only got a certain amount of money...is the government holding off this long really with the grant? Are we going to lose that? So, there's all these things that I have concerns about myself, but I think I do see progress. I know what's going on. I mean, I realize other people don't, but I can see that it's slowly moving now. So, I think a lot of people have given up at this moment of ever having high-speed internet."
- (11) **Regional broadband project leader (Waldo County):** "You asked how optimistic they are. I don't think that's the right word. I think it's 'desperate.' I think 'desperate' is the word. How desperate are they for this to work? And the answer is, 100 percent. The reality is, everybody is realizing we cannot continue without it now. It is now integrated—internet is part of the world and there's nothing you can do. You are a part of it. So, unless you want to go live in the woods and not talk to anybody...that's fine—we support you [and] we love you for it—but, you cannot do business without internet...you cannot...I mean your car has computers in it nowadays ... so, it's becoming more and more...well it already is, right? It has to happen. So, I think that's the feeling for the people that I've talked to who are currently supportive and hopeful and everything else—they're just desperate for it. So, if our current effort fails, we keep working harder to go after more funding and more options, because this has become a no-fail thing for our community. We may differ on how to do it. But, from everything I've gotten from these four towns, with the exception of the guy who wants to live in the woods without power, ... the overall thing I think is desperation, not hope. That may frame things a little bit differently for your work."
- (12) **Island broadband committee chair (Cumberland County):** "I think they know what's coming. They say, you know, 'when is it?' They're impatient of course— 'what's happening?' So, we just put out a little poster—it's going on Facebook as soon as we get around to it and it's already on the website—telling people where we are in the process and what's going on, and [that] it's been held up because of this and that. So, I think people think it's coming. When I talk to people about it, I sometimes get frustrated because things take so long, [and] the tendency is to be consoling and say [to me], 'well you're doing good. It'll come.'"
- (13) **Selectboard chair and retired lobsterman (Hancock County):** "I think we're hopeful. I don't think we expect it overnight. I think it will probably be here as quick if not quicker than we expected. And there will be problems. Just like everything, there will be problems. They can get ironed out fairly well I think. And life will move on."

- (14) **Island broadband committee member (Cumberland County):** “People are frustrated that it hasn’t happened yet. ... We’re getting pushback from the utility companies. Particularly, Consolidated doesn’t want us to hang our fiber on their poles. ... It’s already been delayed a year because of this. It’s ridiculous. We’re going ahead, we’re doing it, and even now it’s going to take six months because it’s going to take them six months to approve us putting fiber on their poles. So, we’re looking at next summer now, at this point. We were supposed to be spring of this year. [Affordability] will be a work in progress.”
- (15) **Island community broadband provider leader (Sagadahoc County):** “We are relatively expensive, for the service level. We’re 25/25, 50/50, and 100/100. We’re \$65, \$85, and \$115 I think...in that range. Our prices were set in our speed reset three years ago, with our application to what is now MCA. The other organizations around us—at other islands—will come online with somewhat the same prices, or a little lower, and much higher speeds. Now, first of all, I’ve never heard one complaint about the 25/25 service. There are no errors and right now, the lag is four to five milliseconds. So everybody thinks it’s fast. A standard high def TV only needs about five megs. Most of what you hear about ‘gig-gig’ service is marketing. You don’t need it. You really don’t need it. Think about it. A 4K TV—and we don’t have 4K programming yet—needs about 25 megs. The *only* people who care about it (high bandwidth), outside of a few esoteric examples are gamers. That’s pretty much it. So, we are planning on moving our bandwidth up this fall after we get a bit of the grant money ... But we have a lot of people that’ll never be more than the lowest float we offer. So, we are expensive right now, but, it’s a lot cheaper than the alternatives—half to a third of the cost of the alternatives.”