

**STATEMENT OF
CHAIRMAN AJIT PAI**

Re: *Establishing the Digital Opportunity Data Collection*, WC Docket No. 19-195;
Modernizing the FCC Form 477 Data Program, WC Docket No. 11-10

In 2013, the FCC decided to collect fixed broadband deployment data at the census block level. It explained that it was declining “to gather fixed broadband deployment data at a level more granular than the census block because the added complexity and burden are unlikely at this time to provide a significant insight into how many residences and businesses lack access to service.”¹ The Commission’s prior leadership then decided to count everyone in a census block as having access to broadband service if any single person in that census block had access to such service.

But as the old saying goes, that was then; this is now. And as circumstances change, so too must the Commission’s policies. In particular, as we focus on reforms designed to provide all Americans with access to high-speed broadband service, it becomes more important for us to be able to identify with more precision the declining number of Americans without such access.

That’s why in 2017, the Commission, under my leadership, launched a comprehensive review of our broadband deployment data collection, otherwise known as Form 477. We proposed a number of changes to improve the data we receive. And today, we’re adopting critical reforms to improve our broadband maps.

Most importantly, we are launching a new fixed broadband mapping effort. Through our Digital Opportunity Data Collection, we will go beyond our current census-block level reporting and instead require fixed broadband providers to submit granular broadband coverage polygons depicting the areas where they actually have broadband-capable networks and make fixed broadband service available. This will give us more precise broadband service availability maps. And critically, we will no longer count everyone in a census block as served if just one person is served.

But that’s not all. To ensure the reliability of these new maps, we will be incorporating feedback from the public, as well as state, local, and Tribal governments. We’re also seeking comment on a framework for identifying where Americans live and work with greater precision, which will work in conjunction with the broadband deployment data collection we adopt today to paint the clearest picture yet of which Americans have access to broadband and which do not.

The reforms that we are adopting today are especially important to our universal service programs. As many noted in the record, when the Commission reports a partially served area as being served, unserved consumers in those areas miss out on vital universal service support that could help deliver broadband services to them. To be sure, the Form 477 broadband deployment data has been an effective tool to help us target universal service support to the least-served parts of the country. But as the number of Americans without access to broadband service continues to fall, filling in the “gaps” in broadband coverage—those areas where some but not all homes and businesses have access to broadband service—becomes that much more pressing. And so we take a fresh, innovative approach to broadband mapping and establish a new data collection that will enable us to start filling in those gaps.

And given the universal service focus of the new data collection, the Commission also recognizes that it makes sense for the Universal Service Administrative Company—the administrator of all four universal service programs—to collect and maintain the broadband mapping data, under the expert oversight of the FCC’s professional staff. The map will be all the more accurate after being integrated with the high-cost HUBB, a USAC portal that collects detailed information about broadband deployments made by service providers funded by the universal service high-cost support mechanisms.

¹ *Modernizing the FCC Form 477 Data Program*, WC Docket No. 11-10, Report and Order, 28 FCC Rcd 9887, 9904, para. 35 (2013).

One important reason I'm so pleased that we are moving forward with this item is that we'll be putting the new maps to work right away. The Rural Digital Opportunity Fund *Notice of Proposed Rulemaking* that we adopted earlier today specifically proposes to use the new map to direct more than \$4 billion in Phase II funding to deploy high-speed broadband networks to serve Americans living in areas of the country that Form 477's census-block level reporting deems served, but where some residents are actually not served. This will be real progress for those residents and for the country.

I would like to thank the cartographers whose hard work is helping us chart our way to closing the digital divide, including Kirk Burgee, Adam Copeland, Justin Faulb, Jesse Jachman, Kris Monteith, Michael Ray, and Steve Rosenberg from the Wireline Competition Bureau; Erin Boone, Garnet Hanly, David Sieradzki, Sean Spivey, Donald Stockdale, and Matthew Warner from the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Ken Lynch, Kate Matraves, and Giulia McHenry from the Office of Economics and Analytics; Denise Coca, Gabrielle Kim, Kerry Murry, and Jim Schlichting from the International Bureau; and William Dever, Keith McCrickard, Chin Yoo, and William Richardson from the Office of General Counsel.