

**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.

215 years ago today, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark recorded in their journals the distances of various landmarks from their White Bear Island camp, in what would later become the state of Montana. They documented things like a “timbered island” one-and-a-half miles to the southwest and a cliff at a bend in the river one mile south. The intrepid explorers who set out to map the West understood the importance of accurate mapping. And that need is no less evident to us as we push the frontier of broadband access so that all Americans can get connected, no matter where they live.

Closing the digital divide has always been my top priority as FCC Chairman. And we’ve been moving forward with bold steps to connect Americans we know are currently unserved. The Commission’s existing broadband coverage maps have allowed us to identify the least-served parts of the country, such as the more than 5.3 million rural homes and businesses that could receive a broadband connection as a result of the upcoming Rural Digital Opportunity Phase I auction.

But as we continue our efforts to bring digital opportunity to every American, we will need more granular and precise maps to know exactly where broadband is and isn’t available. This is especially true for partially served census blocks—areas in which some locations have access to broadband but others don’t. And like Lewis and Clark, we recognize we cannot go it alone, but rather must rely in part on those who live and work in these areas to tell us what the facts are on the ground and help make our maps more accurate and reliable.

That’s why in 2017, I proposed to update the approach to mapping adopted under the prior Administration, and why we adopted the Digital Opportunity Data Collection last August. Specifically, we approved a three-pronged approach to broadband mapping. First, service providers, who have the best information on the design and location of their networks, would provide the Commission with granular information about the areas where they make service available. Second, the Commission would develop a database of all locations where broadband connections might be needed and overlay upon it the coverage information from service providers. And third, the Commission would empower individual consumers, along with state, local, and Tribal governments and other entities, to contribute to the maps and provide feedback on their accuracy.

In March of this year, Congress passed the Broadband DATA Act, largely ratifying our three-pronged approach to broadband mapping. Today, we take the next step in developing the new broadband maps and implementing the Broadband DATA Act. We build on the approach we adopted last August for fixed and mobile broadband mapping. We provide flexibility to providers to design their networks as they see fit, while still ensuring that coverage maps accurately reflect where consumers can expect to have access in the real world.

We do that by allowing service providers to use the information they have about where they can provide service—within guardrails we impose to prevent providers from overstating coverage—and requiring transparency from providers so that Commission staff and the public can see how the maps were created and target efforts to verify the coverage maps to those areas where problems are most likely to arise. And we take steps today to allow consumers, governments, and other entities to directly participate in the mapmaking process and seek comment on the best way to gather and incorporate that feedback into the maps.

All of these measures will result in accurate and precise maps that will allow us to make sure that when a provider says it covers an area, we can be confident service is actually available. And if the maps indicate that service isn’t available, we’ll have additional actionable data we can use to target assistance and further promote broadband deployment.

But unfortunately, not all the news on the mapping front is positive. While today's item is a significant step forward that sets many of the standards for the next generation of broadband maps, Congress has yet to provide the funding we need for implementing the necessary systems for collecting and processing providers' coverage data, developing the nationwide fabric of serviceable locations, or conducting the in-depth verification and challenge processes that will ensure the reliability of the maps. In fact, in the Broadband DATA Act, Congress actually took away from us the only source of funding that was available for this vital work by prohibiting the Universal Service Administrative Company from being involved in this project. The solution to this problem is obvious. As I've said repeatedly, and as we've warned since the fall of 2019, Congress must give us the resources we need to implement the Broadband DATA Act. Or to put it another way, we need money before maps, dollars before data. Once we get it, we'll be able to do the hard work of producing broadband availability maps with unprecedented detail, which will boost our efforts to close the digital divide.

My thanks to the staff in every corner of this agency that contributed to this item, including Pamela Arluk, Kirk Burgee, Justin Faulb, Alexander Minard, Kris Monteith, and Michael Ray of the Wireline Competition Bureau; Kenneth Baker, Erin Boone, Monica DeLong, Stacy Ferraro, Ben Freeman, Garnet Hanly, William Holloway, Susannah Larson, Jennifer Salhus, Dana Shaffer, Ziad Sleem, Sean Spivey, Donald Stockdale, Joel Taubenblatt, Thuy Tran, and Janet Young of the Wireless Telecommunications Bureau; Emily Burke, Jonathan Campbell, Patrick DeGraba, Judith Dempsey, Alex Espinosa, Chelsea Fallon, Joanna Fister, Michael Janson, Rachel Kazan, Eugene Kiselev, Kenneth Lynch, Kim Makuch, Catherine Matraves, Jonathan McCormack, Giulia McHenry, Jeffrey Prince, Steven Rosenberg, Sean Sullivan, and Margaret Weiner of the Office of Economics and Analytics; Martin Doczkat, Monisha Ghosh, Ira Keltz, Padma Krishnaswamy, Aspasia Paroutsas, Robert Pavlak, and Ronald Repasi of the Office of Engineering and Technology; Denise Coca, Jameyanne Fuller, Gabrielle Kim, Kerry Murray, Jim Schlichting, and Thomas Sullivan of the International Bureau; Rizwan Chowdhry, Pamela Gallant, Jeffrey Gee, Rosemary Harold, Kalun Lee, and Jeremy Marcus of the Enforcement Bureau; Eduard Bartholme, James Brown, Zac Champ, Gregory Cooke, Matthew Duchesne, Barbara Esbin, Mark Stone, Patrick Webre, and Kimberly Wild of the Consumer and Governmental Affairs Bureau; Deena Shetler of the Office of Managing Director; Jeffery Goldthorp, Lauren Kravetz, Nicole McGinnis, and Austin Randazzo of the Public Safety and Homeland Security Bureau; and Malena Barzilai, Michael Carlson, William Dever, David Horowitz, Richard Mallen, Keith McCrickard, and Bill Richardson of the Office of General Counsel.