

Conclusion and Next Steps

Consistent broadband metrics can help consumers assess their broadband service and compare service providers in meaningful ways. Actual data on broadband performance and deployment can serve as a tool for broadband providers by lowering customer support costs, by allowing consumers to verify performance of their broadband service without first contacting the ISP for support, and/or by facilitating an ISP's ability to assure that a consumer's service across all elements of an ISP's network is satisfactory. Such data can also assist the research community in understanding performance characteristics of consumer broadband services; encourage the development of future broadband testing methodologies; and lead to improvements in broadband policy and broadband deployment programs. Greater knowledge of the characteristics of consumer broadband performance can help facilitate the development of innovative Internet applications and services.

Scale Methodology Across All Broadband Providers

We believe that a standardized set of broadband measurements can be implemented across a range of ISPs and scaled to support detailed regional assessments of broadband deployment and performance. Discussions with ISPs and vendors during the course of this project have given us confidence that such an approach can be done at limited cost by leveraging ongoing technology deployment within the industry. Such measurement capabilities have the potential to provide consumers with more precise information about their actual service performance and to provide policy makers with an assessment of current and evolving broadband performance. By using sampling methodologies, additional network traffic from performance measurements can be kept to negligible levels. We note that today many ISPs make extensive network measurements for their own benefit. Extending the availability of sampled performance data to the consumer will likewise provide benefits to the end user and to content, application, and service developers.

We can also expand the methodology in this study to assess the overall broadband experience—not just the service delivered to a subscriber by his or her ISP, but the complete connection between a subscriber and the universe of content providers and services with which he or she interacts. Such work might include furthering the development and deployment of the Consumer Broadband Test.

Continue Dialogue with the Stakeholder Community

This collaborative effort across project participants significantly helped the development of the testing methodologies, sampling techniques, and consumer privacy protections that were critical to the study. We intend to continue this collaborative effort to explore ways such testing can be made more efficient and scalable. An ongoing assessment of broadband performance across all regions of the country, demographic groups, technologies, and speed tiers would be helpful in many ways.

Academic Code Review

Both the Commission and SamKnows recognize that while the methodology descriptions included in this document provide an adequate overview of the project as a whole, there will be experts, as well as members of the public and non-profit organizations, who are willing to contribute to the project by reviewing the actual software used in the testing. SamKnows welcomes review of its software and technical platform for non-commercial purposes only.⁴³

All Data Released into the Public Domain

The full raw bulk data set acquired during this study is being made available to the public simultaneously with the release of this Report.