

# Improving Broadband in Harlan County, Kentucky Could Generate \$71.5 million in Economic Benefits

*New Report Underlines the Transformative Potential of Broadband Investments for Rural Communities*

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-- A [new study](#) from connectivity consultancy FarrPoint indicates that Harlan County in Southeastern Kentucky could generate over 70 million dollars in direct economic benefits by improving broadband connectivity infrastructure and driving adoption.



The report, conducted in partnership with Kentucky's Shaping Our Appalachian Region (SOAR) and the nonprofit impact fund Connect Humanity, clearly shows the importance of investing in broadband connectivity in a county affected by depopulation and deprivation.

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*Colby Hall, Shaping Our Appalachian Region*

The coal industry's decline has hit Harlan County's economy hard. More than 30% of county residents have household income below the poverty line, significantly higher than the country's 12.5% US average. The county has also seen substantial depopulation, losing more than a third (36%) of its population since 1980, currently standing below 26,000.

The impact of improved digital connectivity across Harlan County could lead to significant economic benefits:

- Improvements to broadband infrastructure availability

would drive an estimated \$8.7 million economic boost. Access to quality broadband infrastructure in Harlan County is far below the US average (with 16.1% of the county unserved

by broadband networks, compared to 3.8% nationally).

- Increasing broadband adoption to levels seen in the rest of the country could lead to a further \$5.6 million of economic benefit. Currently adoption rates of online services are nearly 9% below the US average.
- Improving the availability of broadband would result in more than 1,000 people either relocating to or staying in the county, with an economic impact of over \$57.2 million.

To tackle the county's depopulation challenge, various programs have been launched in the region to attract people to relocate to Harlan County, including those led by SOAR.

"Broadband is fundamental to efforts to bring jobs, businesses, and new residents to Eastern Kentucky. When I ask people what they need to relocate or invest, high-speed internet consistently ranks top alongside housing, healthcare, and education. This report shows just how transformative connectivity investments can be for rural communities like Harlan County", says Colby Hall, Director at SOAR.

In addition to picturesque landscapes and affordable housing, high-speed connectivity has been one of the main selling points to citizens like Pedro Morgado, who's success story can be found in this report. Pedro, who relocated to Harlan from Florida, said that lack of fiber broadband would have been a deal-breaker for him moving to this area, as it's essential for him to be able to work from home.

For the portions of Harlan County not currently covered by fast reliable broadband, there's a need for further investment to improve connectivity.

"In addition to infrastructure investment, the county also needs to address broadband affordability and adoption concerns to realize the full economic benefits," says Andrew Muir, CEO of FarrPoint. "Our work has shown that increased digital adoption could result in an additional \$5.6 million of economic benefits to Harlan County."

Dan Mosley, Harlan County Judge/Executive, added: "Providing access to broadband has been a top priority for the Harlan County Fiscal Court over the last six years. We are committed to continually evaluating improving this infrastructure while striving to see it more affordable for anyone who desires better connectivity. Access to broadband is as essential as access to water and electricity in today's evolving world and broadband is critical to improving education outcomes and creating more good paying jobs."

[Download the report](#)

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