

## 2019 Annual Minnesota Broadband Profiles | Aitkin County

Rank: 80 (out of 87) for access to 100/20 megabits per second (Mbps)

### Background

Every year since 2017 Blandin Foundation has contracted with Ann Treacy of Treacy Information Services to synthesize data from the Minnesota Office of Broadband Development and broadband news from communities across the state to gauge progress toward the state broadband goals (2022: 25 Mbps down and 3 Mbps up and 2026: 100 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up).

Leaders can use this information to plan and act to improve broadband access and use in their communities.

### Aitkin County: data and community action

Aitkin County is not on track to make the MN State broadband goals for either 2022 or 2026. While the percentage of population covered at speed goals has increased, their ranking dipped this year and last, which indicates that they aren't improving at the rate of other counties.

Percentage of Served Population by Speed and Date			
Aitkin	2019	2018	2017
100/20 (2026 goal)	37.74	17.55	11.52
25/3 (2022 goal)	60.17	45.68	27.48

Aitkin County government and residents have long been organized to promote broadband access and adoption. The county partnered with rural sections of three neighboring counties to participate as the [Central Woodlands](#)<sup>1</sup> in the 2015-2016 Blandin Broadband Community cohort, and then as part of the [Iron Range Broadband Communities](#)<sup>2</sup> (IRBC) cohort. Over the past four years the county has made considerable investment in both dollars and staff time in pursuing better broadband.

They have benefited from two MN state grants in their area:

- 2017 - SCI - Shamrock Township Broadband Expansion – GRANT \$148,503**  
 Project planned to serve 374 unserved households near and around the Big Sandy Lake area in Aitkin County to improve broadband service levels to 250 Mbps down and 20 Mbps up.
- 2016 – Mille Lacs Energy Cooperative FTTP Project -- GRANT: \$1,757,640**  
 Project planned to serve 763 unserved households, 2 unserved businesses, 2 unserved community anchor institutions and 31 underserved households and 2 underserved businesses in Aitkin County with fiber-to-the-premise access.

<sup>1</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2017/08/25/central-woodlands-east-central-minnesota-look-back-at-impact-of-being-a-blandin-broadband-community/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2017/05/24/aitkin-county-gets-blandin-grants-for-wifi-community-website-and-high-tech-conference-center/>



While countywide there are 11 providers, much of Aitkin County is served by only one provider – and that is a large national provider. It can be a challenge to get a national provider to work in an area with such low population density. But Aitkin has been persistent. In April 2019, the county economic development agency hosted a “[Connecting the Dots](#)<sup>3</sup>” event to talk about broadband. Both a [county commissioner](#)<sup>4</sup> and local representative (Lueck) have asked the community to make broadband a priority.

In September 2019, [Senator Klobuchar’s staff held a listening](#)<sup>5</sup> session in Aitkin County. They spoke about the need for government subsidies to build broadband in area with lower population density and CAF II funding was not sufficient because it only required 25/3 service.

Aitkin County could benefit from future grants from the state broadband fund. In 2019, three proposals were submitted that would benefit Aitkin. Emily Coop, Mille Lacs Energy and SCI are hoping to upgrade different parts of Aitkin County. (That doesn’t mean they will get the grant; they have only applied.)

Checklist:

- 100/20 ranking: 80 (down 2 from 2018)
- 25/3 ranking: 82 (down 3 from 2018)
- Has worked with Blandin: yes
- Has received a MN Broadband grant(s): yes
- Household density: 4.0
- Number of providers: 11

Details:

- Blandin Foundation has published a matrix describing community broadband adoption activities by Aitkin and the other communities in its cohort  
[https://blandinfoundation.org/content/uploads/vy/BBC\\_2015-16\\_Project\\_Matrix.pdf](https://blandinfoundation.org/content/uploads/vy/BBC_2015-16_Project_Matrix.pdf)
- Find [more articles on broadband in Aitkin County](#). (<http://tinyurl.com/hdqdmhr>)
- Districts: CD 8  
Senate: 10  
House: 10B  
[Find your reps](#)

**Analysis: Code Red**

- Red (action needed)
- Yellow (warning – ramp up efforts)
- Green (good shape)

<sup>3</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2019/05/12/aitkin-county-finds-better-broadband-would-boost-economic-growth/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2019/05/16/aitkin-county-commissioner-wants-better-broadband/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://blandinonbroadband.org/2019/09/17/sen-klobuchar-staff-visits-aitkin-to-talk-about-broadband-infrastructure-and-housing/>

