

U.S. Home
Broadband Report
2026



America's broadband problem is no longer about speed

On paper, U.S. broadband infrastructure appears stronger than ever. Network investment is up in the billions, coverage continues to expand, and gigabit plans are everywhere.

Yet for millions of American households, their actual broadband experience is getting worse. Frozen streams, video crashes, and lagging games...buffering is a part of everyday digital life that people are reluctant to accept.

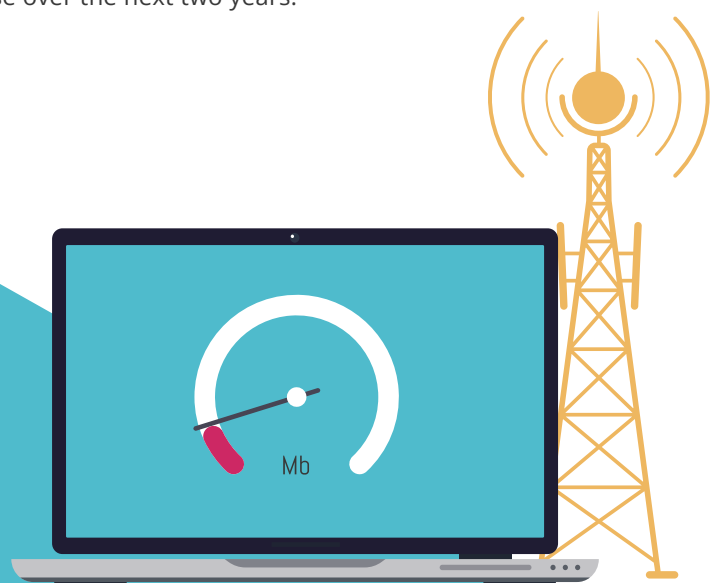
A nationwide consumer survey of 5,040 U.S. households, conducted by Obsurvant and commissioned by RtBrick, reveals the scale of the problem today.



Around 70% of Americans experience buffering. Nearly one in five (16%) encounters it every single day.

The numbers above are worrying enough on their own, but the pressure continues to intensify with more connected devices, richer apps, and heavier usage. More than 1 in 4 households expect their internet usage to further rise over the next two years.

The warning sign is clear: broadband demand is accelerating as performance is becoming less predictable



So, what's wrong with broadband today?

Buffering concentrates where broadband demand is densest and most complex: in multi person homes, growing suburbs, and households juggling several high bandwidth applications at once.

In dense suburban areas, around **one in five** households experiences buffering daily... nearly the same frequency as rural households.

As expected, larger households show higher and more frequent congestion, as multiple latency-sensitive activities run concurrently. Dense suburban areas now exhibit many of the same performance symptoms previously associated with rural connectivity.



Nearly **one in three** internet users in dense, complex environments experience buffering at least once a week



15% of Americans report issues daily as simultaneous activities compete for bandwidth

Consumers want a different experience

It's no surprise that different broadband technologies deliver different experiences. Households served by modern, fiber-based connections have fewer buffering incidents and greater user confidence in their reliability. In contrast, customers with DSL or satellite connections experience more interruptions and trust their broadband provider less to deliver consistently.

But all users are looking for more reliability. The obsession with headline speeds is gone. The key experience differentiator is whether the network can cope with simultaneous demand, dynamic traffic patterns, and latency-critical applications.

Only **37%** of consumers completely trust their broadband provider



This is a major shift for telco operators. Broadband performance is now measured not by advertised speeds, but by how well the network performs under real-world conditions.





The bottom line

Buffering is no longer a minor frustration. It's a visible signal that broadband networks are being pushed beyond the assumptions that underlie their design.

As demand continues to rise, networks built on rigid, monolithic equipment will struggle to deliver performance at cost-points that operators can afford, jeopardizing customer confidence, satisfaction, and long-term competitiveness.

Operators that modernize their network architecture will be better equipped to manage growth and provide what consumers value most: reliability.

If your network is having trouble keeping pace, hesitating to make that fix today won't make it easier in the long run.

Your disaggregation journey starts here!

Speak to an expert TODAY



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Source: Obsurant national consumer research commissioned by RtBrick. Survey conducted in April 2026 among 5,040 U.S. consumers.

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