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A [Pew Research Center study](#) released in May estimated 18 percent of American households are "hyper-connected," meaning they have 10 or more connected devices. Meanwhile, 39 percent of households, the study found, contain at least one streaming media device, such as a Roku, Apple TV or Google Chromecast that customers use to access services such as Netflix and [Hulu](#), along with livestreaming TV options such as Playstation Vue.

It's gotten to the point where most players across the cable industry now have more internet subscribers than cable subscribers. For example, Comcast Corp., the country's largest cable provider, had its broadband subscriber count surpass its cable count more than two years ago. "We're using the internet for more than just surfing the web and sending emails," said Jeff Kagan, an Atlanta telecommunications industry analyst. "We're using the internet to download movies, which are huge files, and to watch live television, which uses enormous amounts of data." So as internet demand has increased, so has internet speed, from dial-up in the 1990s to the 1-gigabit service being rolled out in city after city across the country. RCN, which is using the DOCSIS 3.1 platform, has already rolled out the 1-gigabit service to its other markets, including New York City, Boston, Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington, D.C. "If you're going to be in the game, you have to keep getting faster," Kagan said. "It's just that simple."

The Lehigh Valley's other major provider, Service Electric Cable TV, might get faster. General Manager Jack Capparell said the company offers residential customers speeds up to 330 megabits per second. In addition, he said, Service Electric has been testing the DOCSIS 3.1 platform since January, so the company could roll out faster internet speeds when the Lehigh Valley market demands it.

Now, Capparell said, Service Electric's most popular internet speeds are 25 megabits per second, recommended for less than three devices, and 50 megabits per second, which is recommended for three to five devices. As of now, he added, the rate at which people are upgrading from those speeds to 100 megabits per second or 150 megabits per second remains low. "For the residential customer, 1 gig sounds good," Capparell said. "But in reality, what do they need and what are they willing to pay for?" – *Allentown Morning Call*

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Policymakers, community activists and corporate philanthropists have spent years and billions of dollars grappling with the problem of spotty internet access in rural America.



A Darrington (WA) man is taking matters into his own hands. This month, Jacob Kukuk started the Darrington Internet Users Association (DIUA), Washington state's newest internet utility. Kukuk moved last month from Arlington to a home closer to Darrington in rural Snohomish County. The 28-year-old software developer at the Lake Washington Institute of Technology found the internet options lacking. About 60 percent of residents in the communities east of Arlington along Highway 530 have internet access slower than 5 megabits per second (Mbps), he said. That's a fraction of the 25 Mbps that federal regulators consider broadband.

"It doesn't make financial sense" for big internet companies to invest in the area, Kukuk said. His DIUA aims to bring the area a better alternative. He figures that it can eventually offer internet speeds of about 50 Mbps at a price of \$45 a month for residential users. People with low incomes would be able to apply for reduced or free internet. DIUA is applying for nonprofit status, which, combined with a volunteer staff, should keep costs low, he said.

Service is at least a year off, Kukuk says, but he has a blueprint for how it will work. DIUA will plug into the Seattle Internet Exchange — an entrance ramp to the global internet — lease space on telecommunication companies' fiber optic cables to Arlington, and, from there, beam the signal to users with the association's own equipment. For now, DIUA is offering memberships — at \$150 a piece — that come with an ownership stake in the venture and the right to buy its services down the line. It is also looking for board members and volunteers. "We're starting to get attention, and people are getting involved," he said.

The internet project isn't Kukuk's first stab at civics. In 2015, he was behind a social media campaign to split Washington east of the Cascades into a new state, a move conceived as a way to give rural voters a greater voice in state matters by carving out liberal-leaning population centers in King County. That year Kukuk also ran unsuccessfully for the Arlington city council. — *Seattle Times*

The government review of AT&T Inc.'s \$85 billion takeover of Time Warner Inc. has reached an advanced stage, people close to the situation said, a significant milestone in a deal that was closely watched for signs of

how the Trump administration would view large mergers. The deal's regulatory review has hit a late-stage point where AT&T lawyers are discussing merger conditions with the Justice Department, the people said. The review process has reached that point **despite a vacant seat atop the department's antitrust division.**

An approval could underscore the administration's pro-business credentials at a time when President Donald Trump's ties with America's CEOs are under severe stress. **Two advisory panels filled with a host of top U.S. executives disbanded this week** in response to the president's comments about the violence at a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Va. During his presidential campaign, Mr. Trump had attacked the proposed deal. "AT&T is buying Time Warner, and thus CNN, a deal we will not approve in my administration because it's too much concentration of power in the hands of too

few," he said. Mr. Trump has since avoided talking publicly about the transaction but frequently complained on Twitter about the way CNN, a unit of Time Warner, has reported on him.

Markets are also growing more optimistic about the deal's chances. Time Warner's share price on Wednesday was 5.2% lower than the value of AT&T's cash-and-stock offer—a vast improvement from the nearly 20% discount it traded at when the deal was announced last October. The narrowing of the gap suggests more investors are betting the deal will succeed. Presidents don't approve mergers—antitrust enforcers do—but they set the tone, in part through their appointments, for how big industry-changing deals will be received in Washington. The White House didn't respond to requests for comment.

Consolidation has been afoot more broadly in media. Discovery Communications Inc. agreed to buy **HGTV and Food Network parent Scripps Networks Interactive** Inc. last month, a nearly \$12 billion deal that is partly in reaction to the bulking up of distributors like **Charter Communications Inc., which completed a \$60 billion takeover of Time Warner Cable** last year, and AT&T's pending deal. Broadcasters have been in on the action as well, with local TV station-owning giant Sinclair Broadcast Group agreeing in May to acquire Tribune Media.

AT&T's acquisition of Time Warner would turn the giant telephone company into one of the world's biggest media owners, putting CNN, HBO and the Warner Bros. film studio under the same corporate roof as DirecTV and roughly 100 million wireless users. All along, executives at the companies have said the deal wouldn't hurt competition and can actually help it, because they have little overlap and they hope to become a rival in **digital advertising to** Alphabet Inc.'s Google and Facebook. Among the topics raised in the government's review is ensuring that AT&T doesn't discriminate or treat channels that compete with Time Warner's content less favorably, the people close to the situation said. For example, the government could prevent AT&T from favoring HBO over other premium-TV brands in its marketing and pricing, the people said.

Another issue is AT&T's control of data on customers, especially its wireless subscribers, which could be used to target advertising. The Justice Department has probed whether that data should be available at a reasonable cost to rivals, the people say.

AT&T is counting on its advertising division to fuel a bigger share of future profits and **recently hired Brian Lesser, head of ad agency GroupM in North America, to run it.** AT&T General Counsel David McAtee said it would be inappropriate to comment on discussions with the Justice Department. "We respect the DOJ's confidential process, which allows us to have candid conversations with the professionals at the Department," he said in a statement. "As we have stated previously, that process is on track from our perspective."

Several competitors including the Lions Gate Entertainment Corp.'s premium programming service Starz and rival satellite broadcaster Dish Network Corp. have raised concerns about the deal, people familiar with the matter said. Starz has warned that AT&T could favor Time Warner's HBO in the way it markets the channel and sets prices for customers. After it announced the acquisition, AT&T offered HBO free for a year to some new video and unlimited wireless data subscribers.

Dish, which competes head-to-head with DirecTV, is worried that AT&T owning HBO could give too much leverage to its No. 1 competitor, a person familiar with the matter said. State attorneys general who are reviewing the deal have been exploring similar issues, this person said. AT&T is proceeding with confidence about the review. Last month the company shuffled its management structure and **tapped DirecTV executive John Stankey to lead Time Warner's companies** if the deal is approved. The company said it has no plans to divest CNN, and pledged to support the news network's editorial independence. AT&T has also lined up its financing for the deal, including **through a \$20 billion bond offering.**

There are still regulatory headwinds to the AT&T-Time Warner, including the Justice Department antitrust chief's empty seat. AT&T executives expected the U.S. Senate to confirm deputy White House general counsel Makan Delrahim as antitrust chief earlier this summer, according to people familiar with the matter. Congress kicked off a recess earlier this month, pushing his confirmation to September at the earliest.

Mr. Delrahim said in a May Senate Judiciary Committee hearing **that he would keep politics out of the antitrust division's decisions if confirmed.** He also pledged in July to **tell lawmakers if the White House tries to improperly influence his work** at the department. The Justice Department can still make antitrust decisions without Mr. Delrahim, though a political appointee usually has the final say on whether to challenge a major transaction. An AT&T spokesman said the company is "perfectly comfortable continuing this process with the Department of Justice, with or without Mr. Delrahim's

confirmation.” A Justice Department spokesman and Mr. Delrahim declined to comment. – *Wall Street Journal*



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