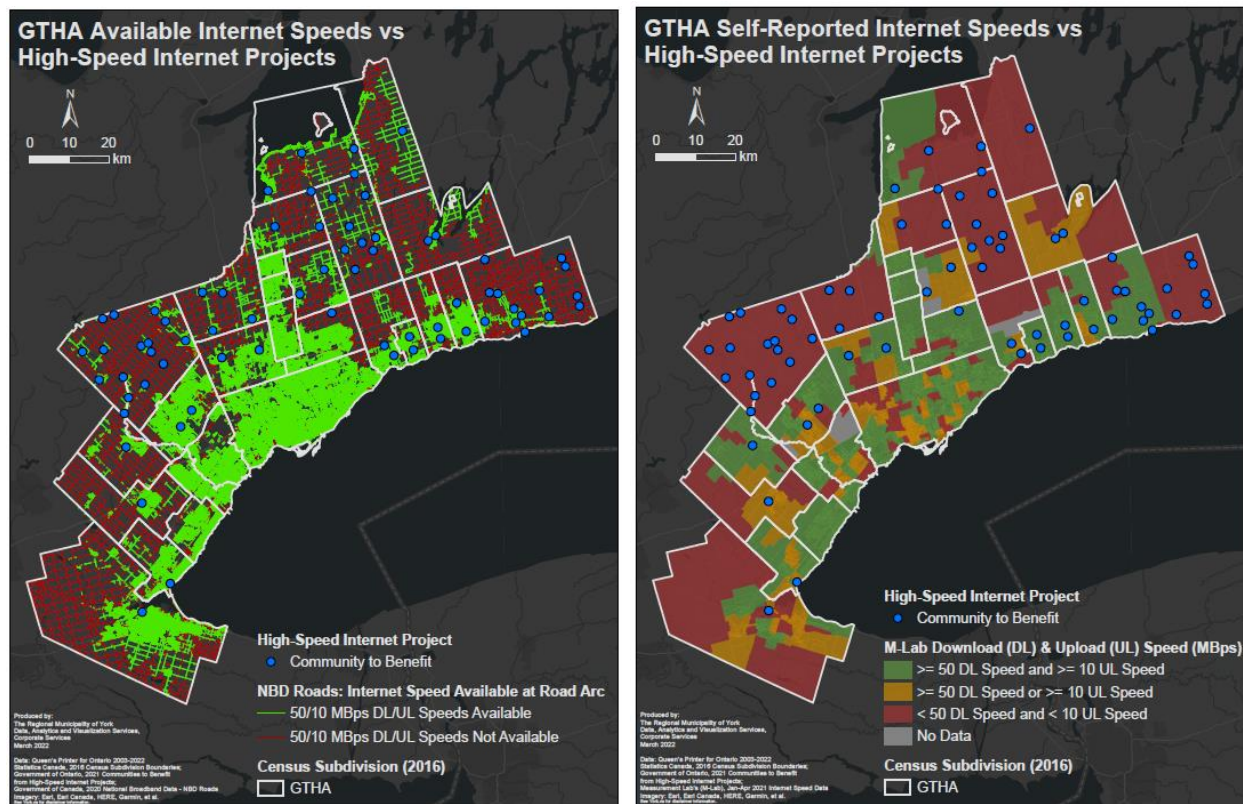


Intergovernmental Partnership to Improve Digital Infrastructure and Address the Digital Divide Internet Speeds across the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA)

The federal government’s Connectivity Strategy has set 50/10 Mbps (upload/download) as a minimum speed for Canadians. Many residents in the GTHA receive speeds below this minimum. As shown in Figure 1, residents in significant portions of the GTHA indicate gaps in the availability of 50/10Mbps internet service in urban areas, despite the existence of digital infrastructure in neighbourhoods that have the capacity to provide these internet speeds. The map on the left depicts where 50/10 Mbps internet speeds are available,¹ while the map on the right depicts residents’ self-reported internet speeds using public diagnostic tools.² In addition to rural communities that are generally known to lack high-speed internet access, large areas in urban centres also lack adequate connectivity. In August 2021, the Governments of Canada and Ontario announced an investment of \$230 million to bring high-speed internet to Central Ontario. The blue dots on the below maps indicate communities benefiting from this funding in the GTHA.³ While many rural communities are receiving needed investments, there is an opportunity to make incremental digital infrastructure investments in urban areas of the GTHA.

Figure 1: Internet Speeds across the GTHA



¹ Data was derived from the National Broadband Data – Roads (<https://open.canada.ca/data/en/dataset/00a331db-121b-445d-b119-35dbbe3eedd9/resource/4c5d8d60-f9dd-4b80-89ed-0b07205c3026>) dataset downloaded from the Canadian Government’s Open Data Portal (<https://open.canada.ca/en/open-data>) (data extract last updated March 2020)

² Data retrieved from Measurement Lab’s (M-Lab) Network Diagnostic Tool between January and April 2021, which collects speed test data from a variety of common speed test platforms.

³ Data retrieved from <https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1000678/ontario-and-canada-bringing-high-speed-internet-to-central-ontario>

There are opportunities to make investments in broadband infrastructure in the GTHA to improve broadband access, quality, and affordability. Broadband funding is most impactful when it is non-discretionary, directed at communities where there is evidence-based and demonstrable need, and where local competition between service providers is enhanced. Many rural areas of the GTHA meet these criteria and provincial and federal investments are needed. In addition, in many urban areas it can be cost prohibitive for ISPs to deploy higher capacity fibre infrastructure, especially in neighbourhoods comprised of older multi-dwelling units. In these scenarios, incumbent service providers have few market incentives to upgrade legacy infrastructure where higher cost services are otherwise unaffordable for low-income households. This dilemma is compounded where there are little to no local competitors. Investments from provincial and federal governments to subsidize upgrading of legacy infrastructure, and incentivize new ISPs to deploy additional fibre, can improve the affordability of high-speed internet for low-income urban households.

Map Attribution

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Data: Queen's Printer for Ontario 2003-2022

Statistics Canada, 2016 Census Subdivision Boundaries; Government of Ontario, 2021 Communities to Benefit from High-Speed Internet Projects; Measurement Lab's (M-Lab), Jan-Apr 2021 Internet Speed Data; Government of Canada, 2020 National Broadband Data - NBD Roads

Imagery: Esri, Esri Canada, HERE, Garmin, et al.

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