Broadband in America Report: FWA Focus

Fixed Wireless Access Market Deep Dive

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SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Fixed Wireless Access Market Focus 2026

Broadband in the United States is changing faster than ever and understanding these market shifts is essential for strategic decision-making. The Broadband in America Report series delivers nationwide insights into broadband coverage, cost, competition, and funding across all network technologies, published semiannually with data updates each spring and fall. Complementary reports offer deeper analysis of emerging technologies and trends shaping the telecommunications ecosystem.

This edition explores the latest trends in **fixed wireless access (FWA) broadband**[1] across the United States, examining how the market has evolved from early-stage deployments into a scaled, mainstream broadband alternative led by national mobile carriers. FWA wireless access is no longer an experiment or a rural stopgap. Led by national mobile carriers, FWA has scaled into a mainstream broadband alternative serving millions of American households and businesses. But reaching scale and sustaining it are two very different challenges.

The central questions shaping the FWA market today are no longer about viability: they are about durability and whether FWA net adds hold up under tighter availability controls, how congestion and peak-hour performance affect customer acquisition, and how BEAD-funded fiber builds will ultimately reshape the competitive landscape.

This report covers FWA's rapid rise – through the competitive and capacity pressures now testing its durability – to the strategic choices that will determine its long-term role in the broadband market.

Mobile broadband coverage in this report is analyzed using H3 hexagonal cells at resolution 9 (h3_9).[2] The data primarily referenced in this report are:

- FCC's Broadband Data Collection (BDC) Service Availability Data
- CostQuest's® Location Fabric of Broadband Serviceable Locations (BSLs)
- CostQuest's Network Cost Model data

BDC Version	Fabric Data Vintage	FCC Coverage Available
Version 6	December 31, 2024	May 20, 2025
Version 7	June 30, 2025	December 2, 2025

[1] Service definitions follow the FCC standard, which requires download speeds of at least 100 Mbps and upload speeds of at least 20 Mbps ("served").
[2] H3 is a geospatial indexing system developed by Uber that divides the Earth into uniform hexagonal cells. Unlike irregular political geographies such as census blocks, counties and states, H3 enables consistent and comparable coverage analysis, making it particularly well-suited for mobility-focused insights. At resolution 9, each cell covers approximately 0.105 square kilometers, providing a neighborhood-scale view of coverage. Under the FCC Broadband Data Collection, providers certify coverage at the h3_9 resolution; a cell is designated "served" if its centroid falls within a provider's reported coverage polygon.

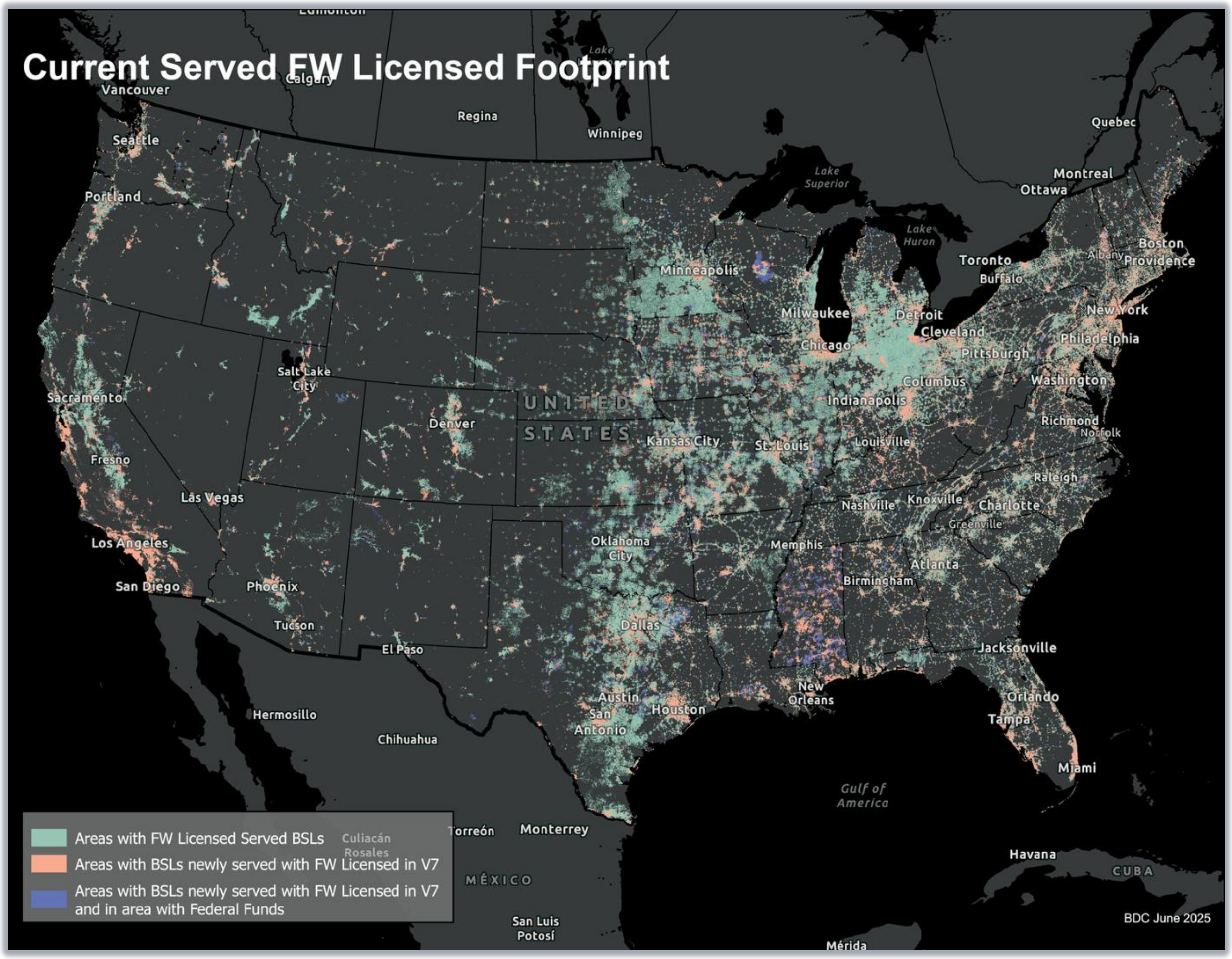
SECTION 2: CURRENT MARKET LANDSCAPE

Setting the stage: Why fixed wireless is at an inflection point

From rural alternative to national contender

FWA has evolved from an emerging alternative into a scaled, mainstream broadband option led by national mobile carriers T-Mobile, Verizon and AT&T, while legacy WISPs continue serving rural and hard-to-reach markets. The central question has shifted from *"Can FWA work?"* to *"Where should it be sold?"* with providers increasingly gating availability at the address level based on local network capacity.

For ISPs, investors, policymakers and municipalities, understanding where FWA is growing, who is driving it, and how federal funding shapes its future is no longer optional: it is a competitive and strategic imperative.



The map above illustrates this shift in real time. Across the country, 5G coverage is expanding while legacy 3G networks are rapidly contacting – a visible signal that the infrastructure underpinning FWA is both maturing and consolidating.

At the same time, federal funding commitments are reshaping which markets FWA can realistically exist long-term. Together, both network evolution and funding-driven deployment define the boundaries of where FWA can grow, where it will face displacement, and where it remains the only viable near-term solution.

FWA's rise: The forces reshaping America's broadband landscape

Over the past six months, U.S. FWA has entered a mature growth phase, propelled by three forces:

1. **Carrier discipline:** Rather than broad-based expansion, leading carriers are focused on capacity-driven deployment, meaning the national carriers driving FWA expansion are not building new tower infrastructure to offer fixed wireless service. They are leveraging their existing mobile networks, selling FWA only to households that fall within their current mobility footprint and only where the towers serving that footprint have spare capacity. This is what "sell where you can serve" means in practice: carriers open and close address-level eligibility dynamically, matching sales to available capacity rather than building ahead of demand. Carriers complement this gating with mid-band spectrum optimization and customer premise equipment (CPE) refreshes to gradually expand what they can sell without overcommitting their networks.

2. **5G infrastructure expansion:** As the map shows, wireless networks on which FWA depends continue to strengthen. Since December 2024, 5G coverage has grown approximately 4%, while legacy 3G coverage has dropped 28% as carriers refarm spectrum for more efficient 4G and 5G use.

Mobile Coverage Snapshot (June 2025)

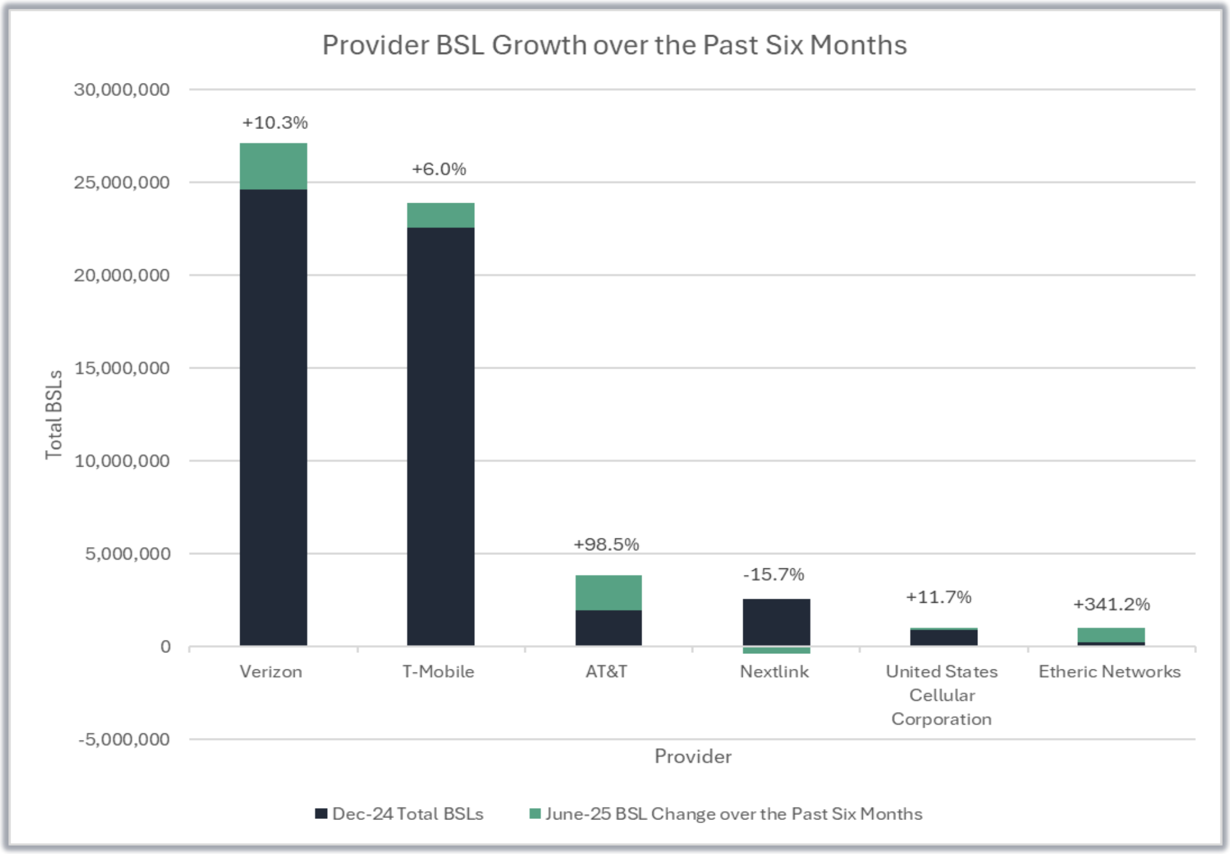
Technology Label	June 2025 hexes	Dec 2024 hexes	Difference	% Change
3G	4,102,955	5,687,339	(1,584,384)	-28%
4G	64,097,036	63,705,672	391,364	+1%
5G (7x1)	46,141,741	44,469,911	1,671,830	+4%
5G (35x3)[3]	35,763,235	34,385,107	1,378,128	+4%

[3] *All hexes served by 5G (35x3) are also served by 5G (7x1)*

3. **Federal funding:** As noted above, federal funding is actively redirecting long-term broadband buildout pointed toward fiber. Providers should plan now for BEAD-funded fiber builds to reach markets currently served by FWA and develop strategies that position fixed wireless as a complementary, or transitional technology to compete against fiber. In the short term, FWA is serving as a critical bridge technology, particularly in rural America, as long construction timelines are just getting started.

Competitive dynamics: Who is winning and how fast

National carriers remain the dominant FWA force, with AT&T, T-Mobile and Verizon driving the majority of served BSL growth. AT&T notably doubled its FWA-served BSLs between December 2024 and June 2025, growing from 1.9 million to 3.8 million BSLs, a 98.5% increase, as Internet Air (AT&T's FWA Program) expanded alongside broader 5G buildouts.



Scale alone does not tell the full story. Where FWA is growing – and where it is not – reveals the pressures that are building beneath the surface.

A geography of strengths & vulnerabilities

FWA's competitive position varies sharply by geography, and those differences expose both its greatest strengths and its most significant vulnerabilities.

- **Rural markets:** FWA remains the fastest broadband deployment lever amid slow fiber timelines and funding dependency. In many communities, it is the only near-term path to adequate broadband. Satellite providers are becoming a credible competitor in the rural market and are competing in the same areas for customers and federal dollars.
- **Suburban markets:** FWA adoption is growing primarily among customers who are attracted to its lower prices and easy installation. However, these same factors make these customers a priority target for cable companies, which are aggressively competing to hold onto them.
- **Urban markets:** Selective FWA growth mainly focus on multi-dwelling units (MDUs), secondary connections, and mobility-first households. Dense urban environments present the greatest capacity management challenges.
- **Enterprise & public sector:** Growing interest in wireless backup, rapid deployment, and temporary connectivity solutions represent a distinct and expanding use case.

Cable fights back

The pattern across the market reveals consistent competitive dynamic: cable remains the primary competitive counterweight to FWA. Cable operators are responding with sharper promotional pricing, mobile broadband bundles, and upstream advantage messaging. The battle is no longer just about download speeds; it is about who owns the full customer relationship.

Satellite encroaches and fiber looms on the horizon

Satellite providers are cutting monthly subscription costs and aggressively pursuing federal funding, encroaching on FWA provider territory. As more satellites launch and service reliability improves, both industries are now competing for the same customers – posing a near-term threat to FWA providers. Beyond cable, fiber expansion looms as a medium-term constraint in markets where high-capacity wired builds are arriving.

Federal funding keeps the long-term direction pointed toward fiber, and as BEAD-funded deployments begin to reach the markets FWA currently serves, providers will face a fundamental strategic choice about how to position fixed wireless in a fiber-rich future.

SECTION 4: KEY TAKEAWAYS

The path forward: Strategic imperatives for FWA's next chapter

1. FWA is now a mainstream broadband technology, but growth is increasingly capacity-constrained

FWA has achieved scale as a credible broadband alternative, but sustainable growth requires a disciplined "sell where you can serve" approach. Carriers managing capacity tightly through address-level eligibility controls and mid-band densification will be best positioned to protect customer experience and reduce churn.

2. Convergence is the new competitive battleground

Cable's aggressive bundle-led retention strategies and wireless carriers' push to deepen multi-product household relationships mean that headline speed comparisons are no longer the primary differentiator. Winning in FWA increasingly means owning the full customer relationship – mobile, broadband and beyond.

3. BEAD-driven fiber overbuild is here, and satellite is closing in from the other side

Federal funding keeps the long-term direction pointed toward fiber, and satellite providers are aggressively closing in from another angle – competing for the same customers and federal dollars. Providers should plan now for BEAD-funded fiber builds to reach markets currently served by FWA, while also developing strategies to differentiate against an increasingly credible satellite alternative. The path forward is to position fixed wireless as a complementary, transitional, or secondary connectivity layer – not a permanent defense against either fiber or satellite.

4. Spectrum, wireless densification and M&A will define the next competitive map

Early infrastructure partnerships and network-driven M&A signals are looking for scale, densification opportunities, and more efficient spectrum utilization. Regulatory clarity around mid-band and mmWave spectrum strategies will further shape FWA performance, particularly in higher-demand urban and suburban markets.

For AT&T, Verizon and T-Mobile, "coverage" is already broadly available; competition increasingly hinges on mid-band holdings and deployment, especially C-band and 2.5 GHz, augmented by low-band coverage and mmWave for urban capacity. 5G-Advanced (3GPP Release 18 and beyond) is expected to bring higher spectral efficiency and uplink performance, lower latency and better energy savings, improved mobility and network slicing, more capable reduced capability/IoT support, further LEO satellite integration, and AI-assisted network optimization, enabling new industrial, real-time and immersive applications.

The bottom line

FWA has earned its place in the American broadband landscape. The technology works, the scale is real, and the growth trajectory remains strong. But the story going forward is no longer about arrival – it is about durability. The providers, policymakers, and investors who recognize this shift and act on it will be best positioned for what comes next.