

Broadband in America Report: Competition

Fixed Broadband Competition Focus

By: CostQuest Associates®

August 2026

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION	1
Forecasting the Next Phase of Fixed Broadband Competition	1
SECTION 2: BROADBAND TECHNOLOGY LANDSCAPE	2
The Starting Point: Fiber Grows, Copper Recedes, Everything Else Holds	2
Fiber-on-Fiber Competition Continues to Intensify	3
SECTION 3: FORECASTING WHERE FIBER GOES NEXT	4
Introducing the Fiber Forecast Model	4
Three Scenarios	4
Where the Growth is Concentrated	5
SECTION 4: IMPLICATIONS AND PATH FORWARD	8
Translating the Forecast into Competitive Strategy	8

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Forecasting the Next Phase of Fixed Broadband Competition

This report is part of the [Broadband in America Report](#) series, which delivers nationwide insight into broadband coverage, cost, competition and funding, published semiannually with data source updates each spring and fall and complemented by monthly editions offering deeper analysis of emerging technologies and trends. Continuing the [Fixed Broadband Competition Focus analysis](#) from the prior semiannual edition, our last report found broadband competition is entering a more mature phase. Fiber growth is increasingly driven by overbuild in markets that already have cable or fiber, while provider churn points to continued consolidation and competitive reshuffling. **Large providers are accelerating this shift, particularly in urban markets, while rural expansion remains more dependent on public subsidy support.**

Three takeaways set the stage for this report.

1. **The next phase of fiber is about competition, density and share capture rather than simply footprint extension in unserved areas.**
2. Large providers are driving the inflection: while small providers have shifted gradually toward competitive markets, **large providers pivoted sharply toward overbuild in the December 2024 to June 2025 period**, a change that aligns closely with the spike in provider mergers and acquisitions.
3. Rural expansion continues, but competitive intensity is rising fastest in urban markets, raising the risk that commercial capital favors already-served metros while the capital-intensive rural cases remain dependent on public support.

Building on that foundation, this monthly installment shifts from assessing today's competitive landscape to forecasting where fiber deployment and competition are headed next. Rather than highlighting today's market, we model tomorrow's, with a focus on where fiber is likely to be deployed next and where competition is most likely to intensify.¹¹

¹ This report references the following Fabric vintages and their corresponding download dates: June 2023 — November 20, 2023; December 2023 — May 21, 2024; June 2024 — November 18, 2024; December 2024 — May 20, 2025; June 2025 — December 2, 2025; and December 2025 — May 19, 2026.

SECTION 2: BROADBAND TECHNOLOGY LANDSCAPE

The Starting Point: Fiber Grows, Copper Recedes, Everything Else Holds

The underlying technology mix remains consistent with what we reported last cycle. **Fiber and licensed fixed wireless continue to grow, while other technologies remain broadly stable and copper continues its steady decline.**

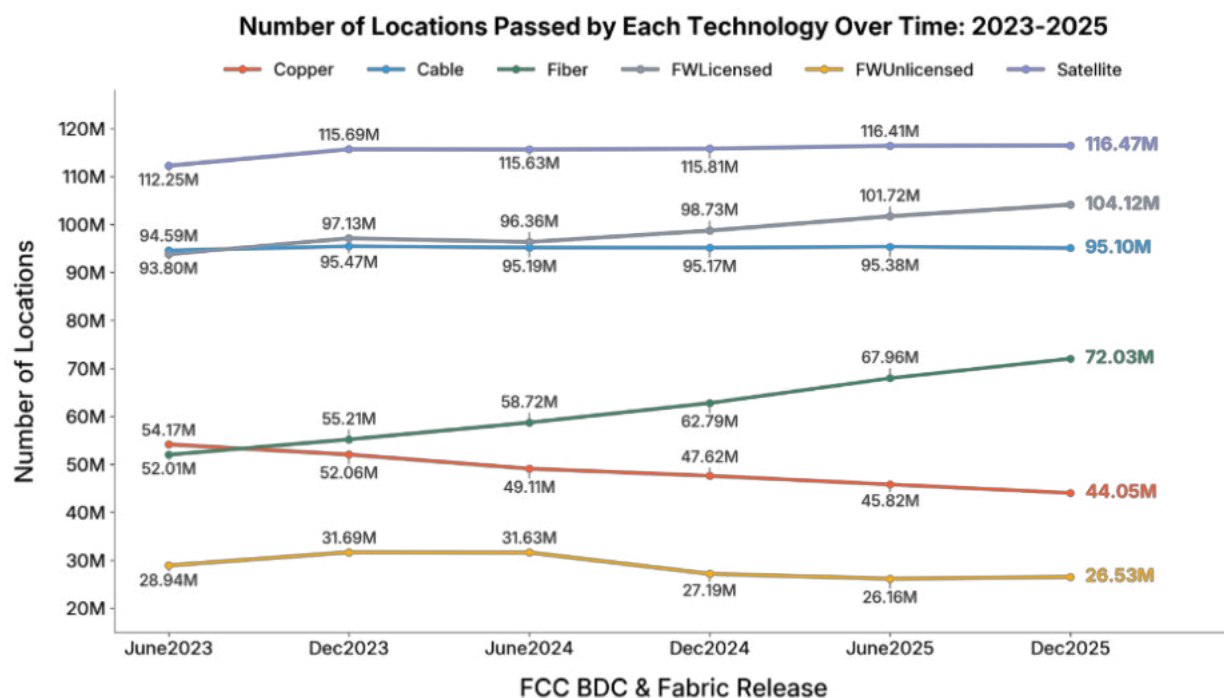


Figure 1: Number of Locations Passed by Each Technology Over Time: 2023-2025

This line chart tracks fixed broadband locations passed by technology type (Copper, Cable, Fiber, Licensed/Unlicensed Fixed Wireless and Satellite) from June 2023 to December 2025, highlighting fiber's rise to 72.03M and copper's decline to 44.05M, sourced from indicated FCC BDC and Fabric releases.

Fiber is the primary major fixed technology adding meaningful new coverage. As a result, fiber deployment is the primary variable that will determine how competition evolves over the next 12 to 24 months.

Fiber-on-Fiber Competition Continues to Intensify

Fiber competition is not only expanding against cable and copper; it is increasingly fiber against fiber. Providers are overbuilding into one another's territories, adding a second or third fiber option in markets that already have one.

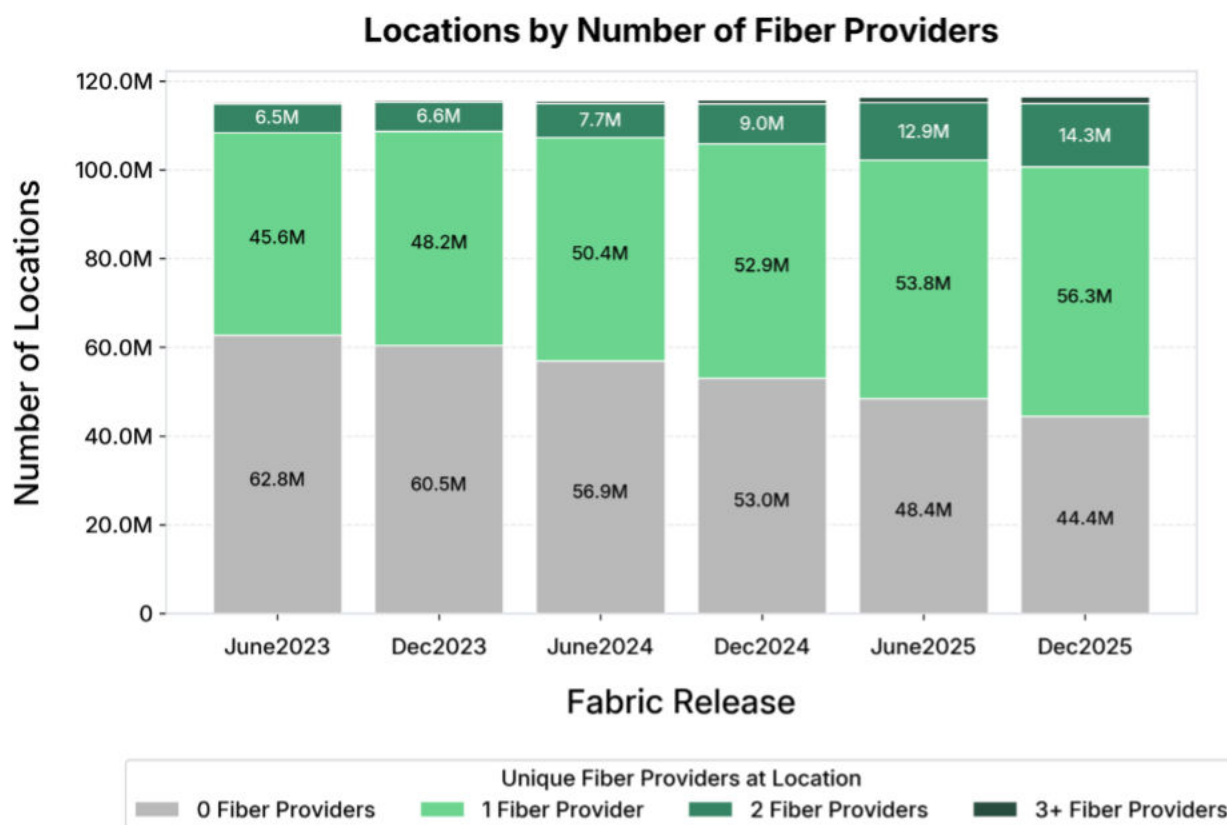


Figure 2: Locations by Number of Fiber Providers

This stacked bar chart tracks U.S. locations by count of unique fiber providers present (0, 1, 2 or 3+) from June 2023 to December 2025, showing locations with zero fiber providers declining from 62.8M to 44.4M while locations with 2+ fiber providers rise from 6.5M to 14.3M, sourced from indicated Fabric releases.

This is the natural extension of the trend identified last cycle: as the opportunity to connect unserved locations shrinks, differentiation shifts from coverage toward service quality, speed tiers, pricing and customer experience. The competitive question for most providers is no longer whether a market has fiber, but **whether it can support another fiber entrant, and who is best positioned to defend or capture share.**

SECTION 3: FORECASTING WHERE FIBER GOES NEXT

Introducing the Fiber Forecast Model

To move from observation to prediction, CostQuest developed the **Fiber Forecast Model**, which projects where fiber is most likely to be deployed in the near term and which provider is likely to provide that service.

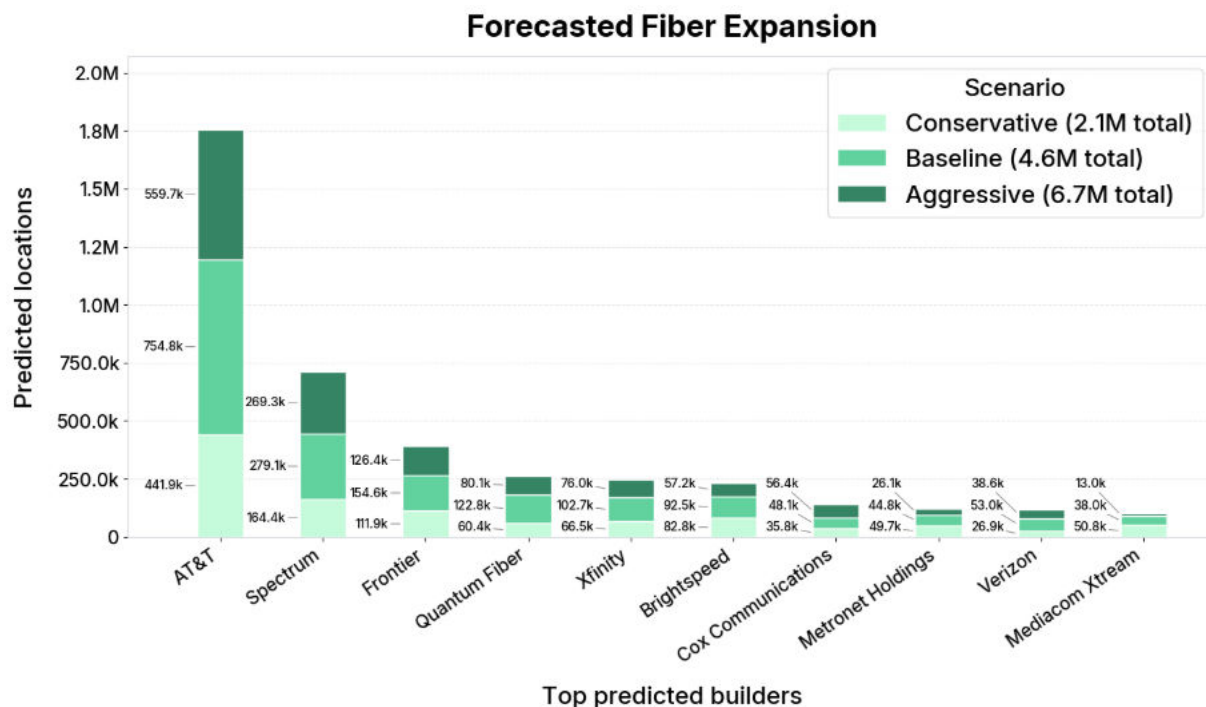
The model takes inputs from historical build activity, location density, competition metrics and demographics to infer which locations that do not currently have fiber are most likely to receive it in the next six-month timestep. Each location receives a likelihood score reflecting the model's degree of confidence that a carrier will build to it.

Three Scenarios

Depending on how aggressively carriers deploy, the model estimates that **between 2.1 and 6.7 million new locations across the country will be covered with fiber within the next 6 months.**

Scenario	Assumption
Conservative	Fiber deployment continues, but at a slower rate than baseline, capturing only locations with a high degree of confidence
Baseline	Fiber expansion continues at a growth rate similar to what we have observed historically
Aggressive	Captures locations with a lower degree of confidence than baseline, assuming some carriers deployed fiber quicker

This is itself a notable finding: the high-case estimate is more than three times the low-case estimate. It reflects how much near-term fiber growth now depends on discretionary capital allocation and competitive posture rather than on remaining demand to connect unserved locations. That is consistent with the large-provider pivot toward overbuild we identified last cycle.



Note: Fiber forecast model predicts fiber expansion to locations that currently have no fiber providers. The forecast horizon is six months. The model does not consider M&A activity, so any providers that reported separately in Dec2025 are treated as separate in the forecast.

Figure 3: Forecasted Fiber Expansion
This stacked bar chart ranks the top predicted fiber builders (led by AT&T, Spectrum and Frontier) by predicted new fiber locations under the Conservative (2.1M total), Baseline (4.6M total), and Aggressive (6.7M total) scenarios over a six-month forecast horizon, sourced from CostQuest's Fiber Forecast for June2026.

Where the Growth is Concentrated

By Provider

The chart below provides some detail on the areas and carriers where the model predicts growth. Three groups stand out as the primary sources of near-term fiber deployment: Traditional larger providers, small regional ISPs (“Other”) and mid-sized providers. In its traditional service states, AT&T leads the prediction for fiber growth. In areas outside AT&T’s traditional footprint, smaller regional ISPs lead the prediction for growth.

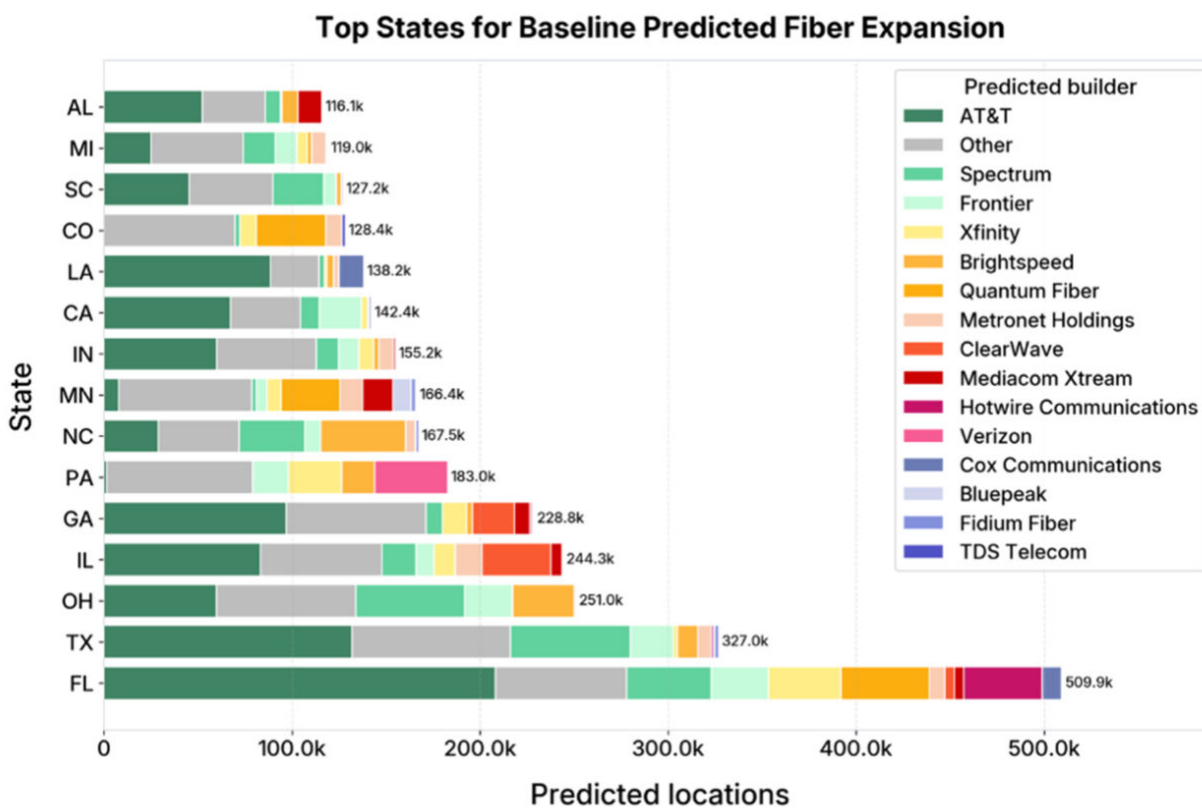


Figure 4: Top States for Baseline Predicted Fiber Expansion

This horizontal stacked bar chart ranks the top 15 states by predicted new fiber locations under the baseline scenario, broken out by builder (AT&T, Spectrum, Frontier, Xfinity and others), with Florida (509.9k), Texas (327.0k), and Ohio (251.0k) leading, sourced from CostQuest's Fiber Forecast for June2026.

This grouping reinforces the competitive dynamic described in the last report: AT&T continues to lead large-scale fiber expansion, smaller regional providers are pursuing selective, increasingly competitive entry, and numerous traditional cable providers are also participating in fiber growth – largely as a defensive and modernization play rather than a push for broad footprint expansion.

By Geography

Under the baseline scenario, the model predicts the most fiber deployment in **Florida, Texas, Ohio, Illinois and Georgia.**

Baseline Predicted Fiber Expansion by State

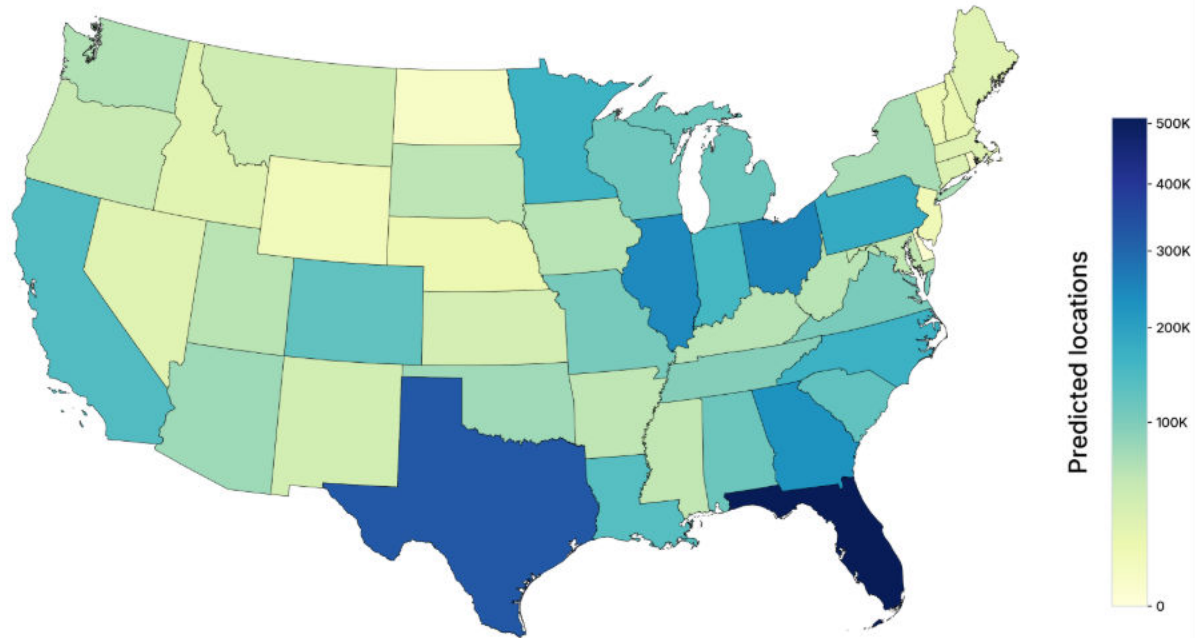


Figure 5: Baseline Predicted Fiber Expansion by State

This map visualizes predicted new fiber locations by state under the baseline scenario, using a color gradient from light (near 0) to dark blue (up to 500K), with Florida, Texas and Ohio shown as the darkest/highest-predicted states, sourced from CostQuest's Fiber Forecast for June2026.

These are largely **high-growth, mixed-density states with substantial suburban and exurban populations; the geographies where overbuild economics work best.** This aligns with the "two fiber economies" pattern from the last report: greenfield builds skew rural, while competitive overbuild concentrates in denser markets.

SECTION 4: IMPLICATIONS AND PATH FORWARD

Translating the Forecast into Competitive Strategy

Taken together, the forecast points to a market that is still growing but **increasingly shaped by competitive strategy rather than remaining unserved demand**. Where providers build next will depend on capital availability, competitive conditions and the evolving economics of BEAD-supported rural markets.

4. Fiber remains the primary growth engine in fixed broadband.

Fiber and licensed fixed wireless continue to expand as copper declines, and other technologies remain broadly stable. **Fiber deployment will therefore remain the main driver of changing competitive intensity**. Providers must also account for consolidation: ownership changes can materially alter a market's competitive profile even without new construction.

5. Near-term fiber growth is large but highly variable.

The Fiber Forecast Model projects between 2.1 and 6.7 million newly fiber-covered locations within the next year, depending on carrier aggressiveness. The breadth of that range shows how much growth now depends on competitive strategy rather than remaining unserved demand. The three-scenario range provides a useful framework for assessment. The conservative case reflects the floor of committed and high-confidence activity; the aggressive case reflects how much additional deployment is available if competitive intensity and capital availability hold.

6. Single-provider rural markets are the next competitive frontier.

BEAD is positioned to improve service and introduce new competitors in markets that have long had few choices. **Incumbents that do not receive funding may face subsidized competitors**. Subgrantees may also extend into adjacent non-BEAD areas to improve the economics of their investments.