

People often complain about their Internet service, but no one ever does anything about it. Well, here's your chance: Nebraska's Public Service Commission wants Nebraskans to take a simple, fast online test that will capture their current Internet speed into a statewide database.

This information could help both policymakers and Internet consumers improve service, PSC officials say.

A website, broadbandmap.nebraska.gov, is part of the Nebraska Broadband Initiative, which aims to increase broadband access and adoption, especially in unserved or underserved areas. The PSC contracted with BroadMap to collect, verify, report and map broadband availability by location throughout Nebraska.

Site visitors will find instructions for conducting a test of their broadband Internet service speed at the time the test is conducted. It takes only seconds and results will appear and be automatically added to a report compiling broadband service speeds across Nebraska.

There's also a place for site visitors to provide feedback on their Internet access.

Commissioner Rod Johnson, chairman of the PSC, said the goal is to capture the current state of broadband availability in Nebraska.

"We're collecting data about availability of broadband by location," he added. "We're also working on projects that influence adoption of broadband. One important use for this information is to be able to incent providers to go places that are unserved or underserved."

Johnson noted that most households in Nebraska do have at least one option for high-speed Internet service, though "sometimes it's not the option consumers want."

Various funding options exist for providing or expanding the availability of broadband service, including state and federal grants, but having valid, up-to-date information is critical to targeting that funding, Johnson said.

"As you make any policy decisions around broadband, the best decisions are made when you have the most important current data about it so you're not funding something that's not necessary or overlooking a spot that needs assistance," said Anne Boyle, PSC vice chairwoman.

Both commissioners noted that consumer input can help the PSC make corrections to the data used to produce its map of service providers available in Nebraska.

Much of the state has at least five providers of broadband access available. Informed consumers can make the best decisions, Johnson and Boyle said.