



Coronavirus Pandemic Seen To Accelerate 5G Rollout In US

5G carriers claim that the coronavirus pandemic has actually increased demand for wireless bandwidth and thus make it ever more important to quickly rollout 5G towers around the nation to increase wireless capacity. □ TN Editor

In March 2020 everything that could be moved online already has, from elementary schools to [college classes](#), from entire company workforces to [shareholder meetings](#). Whole cities have emptied under the coronavirus threat as businesses tell employees to work from home, students are sent indoors to learn online and every type of entertainment— from restaurants and sporting venues to movie theaters — shuts, forcing people to stay home and rely on their home broadband networks to interact with the outside world.

This switch-over is unprecedented, which begs the question: Can our current networks handle the strain?

Moreover, is the [coronavirus outbreak](#) and the “social distancing” required to mitigate the spread going to become the business case for

more advanced and robust 5G technologies for a future in which business, health care and human interaction must be at more than an arm's length?

The jury is still out on whether home broadband, which tends to have lower capacity than more robust business networks, will be able to handle the traffic as whole neighborhoods become Wi-Fi hotbeds as adults video conference with their co-workers and their teens stream videos in between checking Blackboard for assignments. Providers, including [AT&T](#), [Verizon](#), and [Comcast](#), are facing a test of whether they'll be able to handle the increased demand.

Jessica Rosenworcel, an FCC member, said the influx of people working from home is a test for the current networks. "We're going to have a big stress test on our networks," she said. "There are a lot of potential points of stress." The FCC has given the carriers access to additional bandwidth for the next 60 days to handle the additional users. ([T-Mobile](#) is so far the only carrier to take the FCC up on its offer to use spectrum in the 600 MHz Band to help meet increased consumer demand for broadband during the coronavirus pandemic.)

Rosenworcel said it's too soon right now to assess how the networks are handling the stress. "These are still early days," she said.

The carriers remain optimistic. "As a global company, we have extensive experience in planning for and responding to a wide variety of situations around the world," said Jim Greer, AT&T assistant vice president for communications. Greer said that the company is constantly monitoring developments in the coronavirus outbreak and is taking the appropriate steps "to help maintain the ongoing health and safety of our employees and customers."

Greer added that in cities in which the coronavirus has had the biggest impact, AT&T is seeing fewer spikes in wireless usage around particular cell towers or particular times of day because more people are working from home. The company continually monitors bandwidth usage to help it run its network.

In a [March 12 interview](#) with CNBC, Verizon CEO Hans Vestberg said he

didn't see any major changes in Verizon's data usage during this coronavirus pandemic in the U.S. "So far, I'm really pleased with how the network is performing," he said, adding that the company is monitoring the network "24/7."

Verizon also issued a [press release](#) on Wednesday stating the demands on bandwidth increased 75% over the previous week. Social media use was flat.

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