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Connect USVI’s $84 Million Fiber Buildout Targets 46,000 Locations Across the Territory

Connect USVI is backed by $84 million over 10 years to build an all-fiber network reaching about 46,000 planned locations across the territory, according to a new federal report. The figure does not mean 46,000 connections have already been completed.

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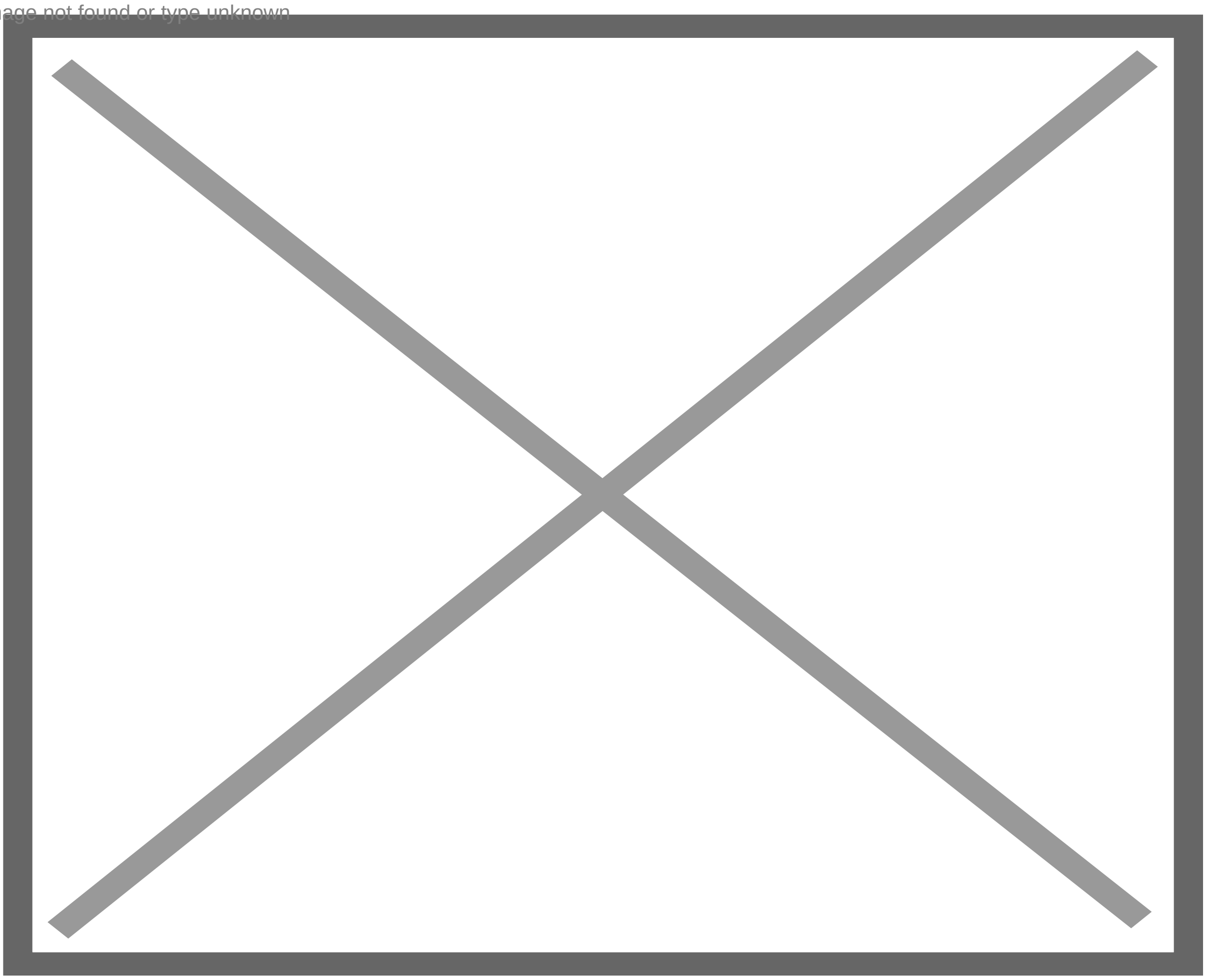

Liberty VI crews install fiber infrastructure on St. Thomas, illustrating the territory’s broadband buildout as a new GAO report details the $84 million Connect USVI project covering about 46,000 planned locations.

A new Government Accountability Office review of federal broadband programs places the Connect U.S. Virgin Islands program at approximately $84 million for a planned fiber network reaching about 46,000 locations across the territory, offering a consolidated federal accounting of the scale of the decade-long buildout.

The report, released Monday, identifies Connect USVI Stage 2 Fixed Support as a single project receiving $84 million over a 10-year funding period. GAO classifies the planned network as 100 percent fiber and places the project in its 100/100 Mbps planned-speed category. Its analysis is based on data from the Federal Communications Commission's Broadband Funding Map.

The figures align with the FCC's original 2021 authorization, which was more precise. The commission approved $84,456,870 over 10 years for 46,039 locations — $47,561,270 for 20,838 locations on St. Croix and $36,895,600 for 25,201 locations across St. Thomas and St. John. Broadband VI was originally selected for the support, with FCC records later identifying Liberty Mobile USVI, Inc. as the successor company.

GAO's approximately 46,000 figure should not be interpreted as 46,000 completed connections, current subscribers or homes already passed by fiber. The watchdog describes them as planned locations and says its location figures are rounded, noting limitations in the underlying federal datasets.

The report's 100/100 Mbps designation also does not mean that 100 Mbps is the network's maximum planned speed. GAO groups projects according to the lowest download and upload speeds reported in the federal funding data, while the FCC's original Connect USVI authorization contemplated service tiers reaching speeds of up to 1 gigabit per second.

Under the FCC's deployment requirements, the supported carrier was required to offer service to 40 percent of supported locations by the end of 2024 and another 20 percentage points in each succeeding year, reaching 100 percent by Dec. 31, 2027. The GAO report does not establish how many Connect USVI locations have actually been completed to date, so those required milestones should not be treated as evidence of actual deployment progress.

GAO's broader nationwide review also raises concerns about how federal agencies identify underserved locations and oversee other broadband investments. It found that the FCC's broadband-map challenge process can be burdensome or unclear for smaller communities and providers, potentially impairing the accuracy of information used to target federal funding.

Separately, GAO said the National Telecommunications and Information Administration needs a stronger process for monitoring the long-term financial sustainability of projects funded through the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment program, or BEAD. FCC and NTIA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

That sustainability finding should not be applied to Connect USVI. GAO did not conclude that the territory's Connect USVI Stage 2 project is financially unsustainable; that portion of the watchdog's criticism concerns NTIA's oversight of BEAD projects.