

# Broadband Update

Buncombe County Board of Commissioners

February 18th, 2025



# Agenda

- Broadband Project Updates
  - GREAT
  - CAB
- Cellphone Service
- Next Steps



# Broadband Project Updates



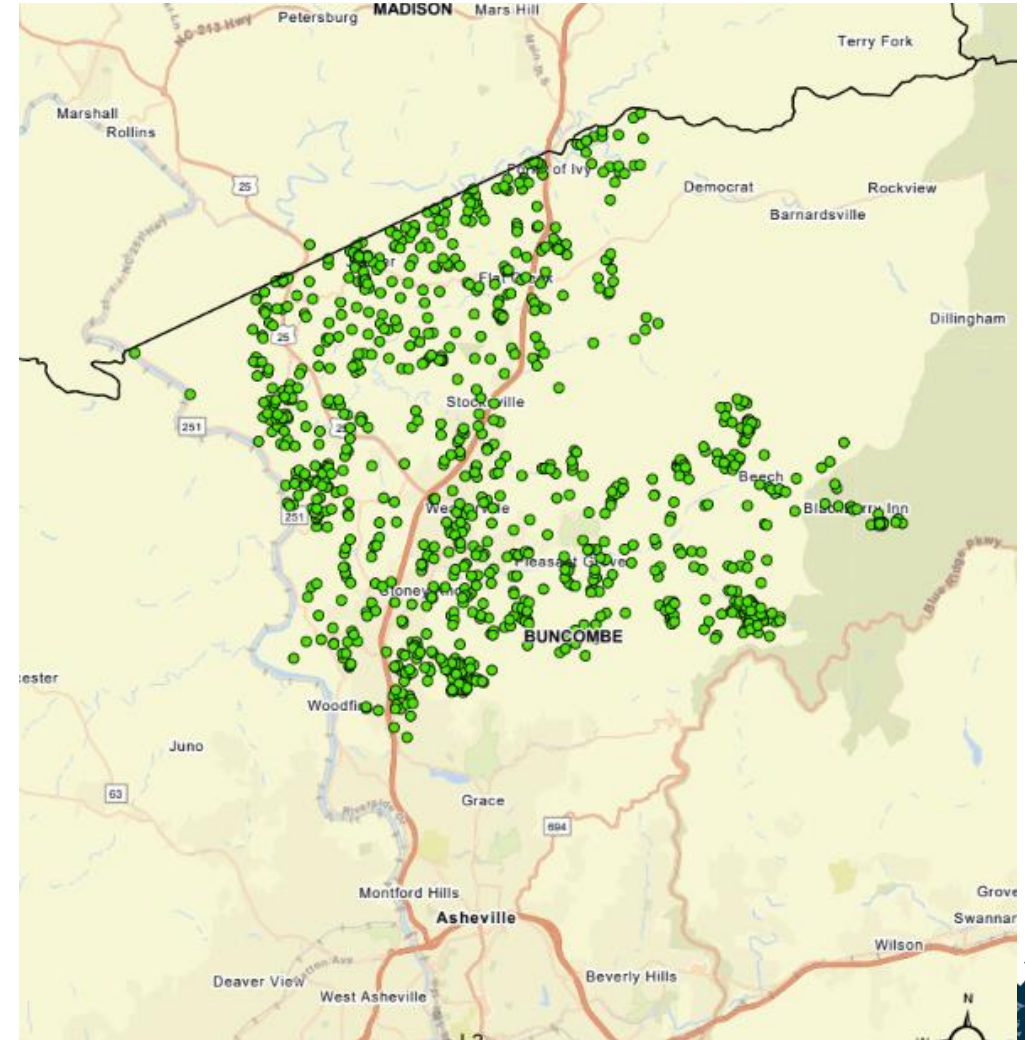
# GREAT – Skyrunner

- **Contract:** finalized (April 2022) and first grant installment paid (March 2024)
- **Areas Impacted:** Leicester and Fairview
- **Awarded locations:** 493
- **Construction period:** ends November 2025
- **Status Updates (as of 12/31/24):**
  - **Project Design:** 25%-75% complete
  - **Construction:** 25%-75% complete
  - **Infrastructure damage from Helene:** repairs complete



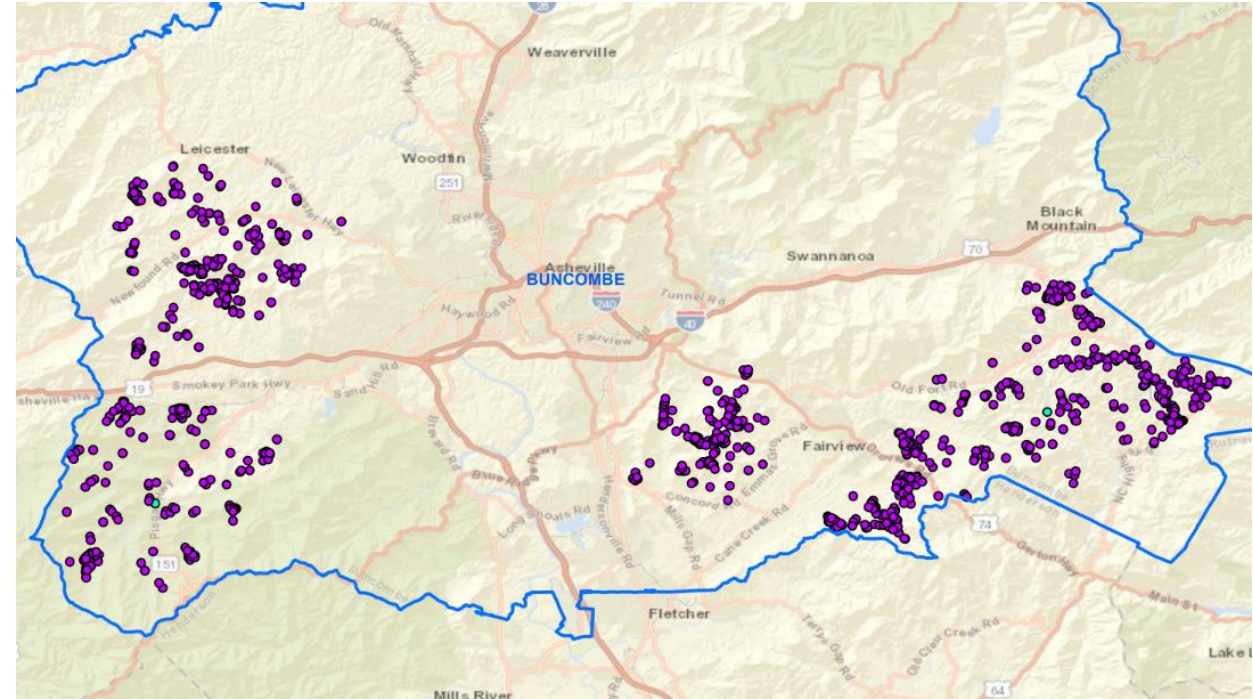
# GREAT – Frontier

- **Contract:** finalized (May 2023) and first grant installment paid (June 2024)
- **Area Impacted:** North Buncombe
- **Awarded locations:** 964
- **Construction period:** scheduled to end April 2025 – requested extension due to Helene
- **Status updates (as of 12/31/24)**
  - **Project Design:** 100% complete
  - **Construction:** Less than 25% of complete

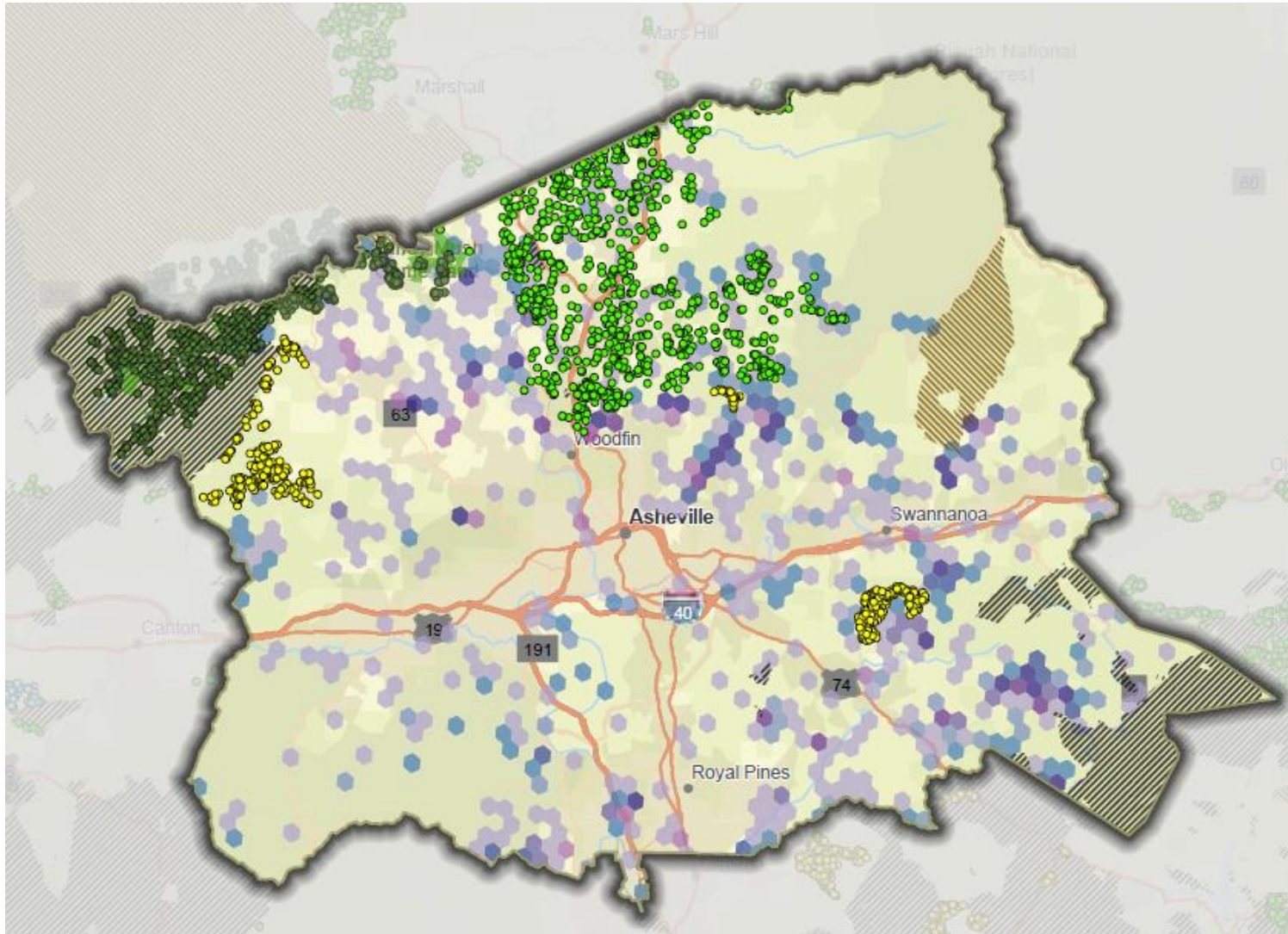


# CAB – BellSouth (AT&T)

- **Contract:** finalized (July 2024) and County Match Requirement removed by General Assembly (November 2024)
- **Areas Impacted:** Broad River, Upper Hominy, and Fairview
- **Awarded Locations:** 967
- **Status update:**
  - Construction period ends 10/31/2026 – on track to meet this deadline



# Buncombe NCDIT Profile as of Sept. 2024



- Most recent NCDIT profile is missing the CAB project
- Significant progress toward broadband expansion
- 2,079 remaining unserved or underserved locations
  - Estimated 15,000 unserved or underserved locations



# Cell Phone Service





# Cell Phone Service post-Helene

## Updates

- As of October 20<sup>th</sup>, cell phone service recovery was over 98%, or within the range of normal operations
  - 311/348 cell sites were back online across all carriers
  - At this time, the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) stopped publishing reports
  - Ongoing reporting: systemic issues have previously been flagged from public safety, inspectors, social workers, etc.

## Buncombe Tower Sites

- BC IT team is working with carriers to lease space for equipment at two sites: Broad River and Landfill
- Buncombe County continues to make tower sites (~15) available for lease for providers (AT&T, Verizon, etc.) to lease for their equipment



# Next Steps



# Existing Projects

## CAB and GREAT Grants

- Completed construction anticipated in 2025 and 2026

## Recent Award – NTIA (National Telecommunications and Information Administration) Digital Equity Award for "WNC Connecting All Communities" Project

- Notice received January 2025
- Land of Sky lead applicant
- Buncombe County Libraries is a participating partner
- **Outcomes:** BC Libraries will purchase a mobile library unit and provide digital equity access in rural and low- to moderate-income communities
- More details to come, NTIA and LOS are evaluating impact of recent Executive Orders



# Upcoming Broadband Opportunities

## Stop Gap Grant Program

- Guidance is TBD
- Program leaning towards small projects (e.g., less than 25 houses)
- Potential provider/county/resident process to identify areas and apply for grant funding for line extensions

## CAB 2.0

- State-run process
- Buncombe has not yet received proposals
- Scope of Work for Buncombe County anticipated mid-February



# Questions?



# Appendix



# Broadband Expansion Background

North Carolina does not currently allow local government to treat broadband as a public utility. (NC General Statute § 62-2. Public Utilities Act, Declaration of Policy)

Recognizing that adequate broadband service is essential to its citizens and economy, since 2016 Buncombe County has taken a more active role to entice competition and improve service offerings.

Broadband expansion is essential for:

- Public Safety
- Economic Development
- Healthcare/Telehealth
- Digital Inclusion/Reducing the Homework Gap



# Broadband Expansion Timeline

- 2016, WestNGN (West Next Generation Network) launches to stimulate the deployment of broadband networks in WNC
  - Land of Sky Regional Council
- 2019, Buncombe County Community Survey and Profile
  - 12% of homes considered unserved by any internet provider (15,000 parcels estimated)
- 2020, Buncombe County Government created the Buncombe Broadband Workgroup to respond to growing need for broadband access to served and underserved households





# Broadband Expansion Timeline

- 2021, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), in North Carolina, Gov. Cooper and the General Assembly dedicated more than \$1 billion for digital equity, including \$971 million for infrastructure
- Buncombe County Projects:
  - GREAT, Growing Rural Economies with Access to Technology Grant: **two projects** awarded in Buncombe
    - **\$5.1 million** total award from State
    - **\$479,000** County Match
  - CAB, Completing Access to Broadband: **one project** awarded, CAB 2.0 Scope of Work is pending
    - **\$7.2 million** total award from State
    - **\$0** County Match (as of November 2024)



# Resources

- [Buncombe County Community Profile 2019](#)
- [North Carolina General Statute, Public Utilities Act](#)
- [NCDIT Division of Broadband and Digital Opportunity](#)

