

More for Less: Broadband Price and Quality Trends, 2020–2026

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The Federal Communications Commission (“FCC”) collects annual data on broadband prices through its Urban Rate Survey (“URS”), covering a wide range of speed tiers and providers across urban markets. In the right analytical hands, the data offer an opportunity to track broadband prices over time.

Yet, price is only one measure of market performance. Experience indicates that the quality of broadband service—typically measured by download speeds—consistently improves over time. Over the years, many Americans have experienced a dramatic upgrade in speeds (hundreds of megabits-per-second in some cases) without any compensating price adjustment, thereby substantially reducing quality-adjusted prices. Market performance, therefore, involves some mix of price and quality changes over time.

A meaningful assessment of broadband prices or “affordability” therefore requires examining both dimensions together. A service that costs the same today as it did six years ago but delivers ten times the speed is not evidence of market stagnation but of market improvement. Conversely, a rising average price which reflects consumers purchasing faster services rather than paying more for the same service is not evidence of a worsening affordability problem.

In this PERSPECTIVE, I use the URS data to examine broadband price and quality trends from 2020 to 2026. Intentionally, the approach used here is transparent and requires no

sophisticated statistical methods—the data speak directly. Four findings emerge.

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First, the broadband speed ladder migrated dramatically over the period: the dominant offered tier shifted from 100 Mbps in 2020 to 1,000 Mbps by 2026, reflecting systematic retirement of legacy tiers and rapid expansion of gigabit service. Second, real prices fell at every speed tier examined—from 10 Mbps to 1,000 Mbps—often substantially. Third, at fixed prices, broadband speeds rose dramatically, with speeds doubling at a fixed price about every 2.6 years. Fourth, and most strikingly, the real price of today's flagship broadband tier closely mirrors the real price of the flagship tier six years ago—consumers in 2026 pay roughly the same for 1,000 Mbps as consumers in 2020 paid for 100 Mbps. The

product ladder reproduced its own price structure at ten times the speed.

Prior Work on the Urban Rate Survey

In two prior studies, I used the Commission's Urban Rate Survey data to examine broadband price trends, finding large and statistically significant price declines over time.¹ An important insight of these works is that download speed ladder migration has direct implications for price measurement. Analytical approaches that compare average prices without controlling for the changing composition of offered services will tend to overstate price increases or understate price declines as the product mix shifts toward higher speeds.²

... per-dollar download speeds are doubling every 2.8 years, on average. This is a remarkable pace of quality improvement, prices constant.

The first study, covering 2015 through 2020, constructed a Fisher-ideal broadband price index using hedonic methods, finding that real broadband prices fell by approximately 36% over the period—about 8.5% annually. The second study, released earlier this year, examined the 2024-2025 URS data and employed a matched-cell decomposition to isolate the pure price effect from compositional bias, finding price declines of 7% to 9% in a single year. Hedonic methods applied on the data provided comparable results to the matched-cell approach. Both studies found no evidence of rising broadband prices when quality is held constant, and the annual price reductions were comparable between the two studies at about 8%.

Here, I take a step back from the methodological complexity of hedonic indices and matched-cell decompositions and ask a simpler question: what do the FCC's URS data, organized transparently by the more common speed tiers, reveal about

broadband price trends over the period 2020 to 2026? The simple tier-by-tier approach used here sidesteps the composition problem by comparing mean prices at fixed speed tiers across years, so that the speed dimension of quality is held constant by construction. The simplicity of this approach is intentional. A transparent, tier-by-tier price comparison is accessible to policymakers, advocates, and non-specialists who need to understand broadband pricing trends without working through index number theory.

This price comparison by speed tier approach can be inverted by evaluating the change in average speeds at several (real) price tiers. That is, at fixed prices, how does speed change over time? The two approaches coincide, of course, but offer a different focus on the market performance metric—price or speed.

Data

The data used in this analysis are from the FCC's URS data from the 2020 and 2026 surveys, with data from years 2019 and 2025. Survey weights, which are used throughout the analysis, change over time and are thus normalized. Nominal prices (total charges) are converted to real prices using the Consumer Price Index for urban areas with 2025 (2025) as the base year.³ The CPI rose approximately 26% over the period (255.65 to 321.96), or 3.9% annually. The data are restricted to prices for the contiguous United States.

The six most common download speed tiers (no less than 500 observations) over the sample frame are included in the analysis: 25 Mbps, 50 Mbps, 100 Mbps, 300 Mbps, 500 Mbps, and 1,000 Mbps.⁴ Speeds above 1,000 Mbps are excluded (there is no data in 2019). Five price baskets are defined: < \$25, \$25-49.99, \$50-74.99, \$75-\$99.99, and \$100-125.

Restricting the sample to these speed tiers produces a sample of 6,628 observations. Samples are larger in the later data: 1,751 in 2019

and 4,877 in 2025. In both years, the sample sizes are generous.

Market Performance Over Time

To begin, I look at the (weighted) share of broadband plans for the speed tiers by year. The results are summarized in Table 1. Over the years, the migration to higher-speed tiers is unmistakable.

Table 1. Speed Tier Shares by Year

Speed	2019	2025
25 Mbps	11.4%	3.2%
50 Mbps	8.7%	3.8%
100 Mbps	30.8%	9.2%
300 Mbps	22.9%	15.9%
500 Mbps	5.5%	32.9%
1,000 Mbps	21.2%	35.0%

In the 2019 data, tiers less than or equal to 100 Mbps are more common, while in 2025 the higher speed tiers dominate the sample. In 2019, the largest share is 100 Mbps while in 2025 it is 1,000 Mbps.

Price Change by Speed

Next, in Table 2, I turn to mean prices by year and by speed tier.⁵ Primary interest is in the price pattern over time. For all the speed tiers, average prices have declined over the years. Broadband price declines are substantial, with mean price reductions of 48.6% over the six years, or about 7.2% annually.⁶ For the most part, within each year, faster speed tiers are more expensive.

Table 2. Real Prices by Speed Tier

Speed	2019	2025	Change
25 Mbps	\$74.09	\$68.94	-7.0%
50 Mbps	\$75.33	\$61.83	-17.9%
100 Mbps	\$99.55	\$50.58	-49.2%
300 Mbps	\$161.89	\$74.31	-54.1%
500 Mbps	\$146.66	\$84.77	-42.2%
1,000 Mbps	\$131.98	\$101.97	-22.7%

Perhaps the most striking illustration of broadband price decline is the shift in market composition across tiers. In 2019, the 100 Mbps tier commanded the largest sampled subscriber share at 30.8%, representing the *de facto* flagship offering of the residential broadband market. By 2025, the 1,000 Mbps (gigabit) tier had assumed that role, accounting for 35% of subscribers. Consumers in 2025 are thus purchasing roughly ten times the download capacity at approximately the same real price as the 2019 flagship—a tenfold increase in delivered value per dollar over six years. *Quality-adjusted prices* for the flagship broadband offer are falling at an annualized rate of approximately 32%, far exceeding the price reductions documented in Table 2.⁷

Table 3. Real Prices by Provider Tiers

Provider	Down/Up	2019	2025	Change
Altice	200/20	\$111	\$74	-\$38
AT&T	100/20	\$88	\$70	-\$18
AT&T	1000/1000	\$126	\$90	-\$39
Cable One	300/30	\$101	\$75	-\$25
Comcast	1000/35	\$143	\$110	-\$33
Cox	300/30	\$132	\$70	-\$62
Cox	1000/1000	\$151	\$120	-\$31
Frontier	300/300	\$131	\$70	-\$61
Mediacom	500/30	\$170	\$100	-\$70
Verizon	940/880	\$170	\$100	-\$70

Over the six years in the sample, the plans offered by most providers migrated to faster speed offers (retiring slower speed plans as networks improved). There are, however, a few instances where within-provider prices can be compared with a given download/upload speed tier. Table 3 summarizes the prices and the dollar-value change for several of these offers spanning a wide range of speeds.⁸

Across the board the price reductions are substantial, and consistent with the changes for the broader sample summarized in Table 2. The price for AT&T’s 100/20 Mbps service fell \$18 over six years, falling from \$88 in 2019 to \$70 in

2025. Cox's price for 300/30 Mbps service fell from \$132 to \$70—a \$62 reduction. Verizon's price of symmetric near 1 Gbps service fell \$70 over six years to \$100 per month.

Speed Per Dollar

Inverting the analysis, Table 4 summarizes the mean speed for several price groups. That is, if the broadband bill is unchanged, then how much does *speed* increase?

Table 4. Mean Speeds by Price Tier

Speed	2019	2025	Change
< \$25	31.1	77.0	147.1%
\$25-49.99	57.8	128.9	123.1%
\$50-74.99	51.6	252.4	389.5%
\$75-\$99.99	115.7	505.0	336.6%
\$100-125	378.7	998.5	163.6%

From Table 4 we see that between 2019 and 2025, for all price tiers. For customers targeting a \$50-75 plan, download speeds more than doubled over the six years, with speeds rising 390% for the popular price tier. For the lowest price group (less than \$25), mean speed rises from 31.1 Mbps to 77.0 Mbps; a more than double increase in speed. For the highest price group (\$100-\$125), mean speed rose from 379 Mbps to essentially 1 Gbps, a near three-fold increase in speed at a fixed price.

Broadband price declines are substantial, with mean price reductions of 48.6% over the six years, or about 7.2% annually.

Across all price tiers, the growth in download speed, price constant, is 24.6% annually.⁹ Thus, per-dollar download speeds double every 2.8 years, on average. This is a remarkable pace of quality improvement, prices constant.

Conclusion

The evidence presented here is potent. Broadband prices are falling for a fixed quality, and quality is rising for a fixed price. A wide range of price-tier combinations are available so that consumers can choose what best suits their needs and budgets. Claims that broadband is becoming less affordable are difficult to reconcile with a market where speeds have tripled at every price point over six years, and speeds double every 2.8 years at fixed prices. Plainly, performance is exceptional in the broadband marketplace.

NOTES:

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¹ G.S. Ford, *Are Broadband Prices Declining? A Look at the FCC's Price Survey Data*, PHOENIX CENTER POLICY PERSPECTIVE No. 20-07 (October 26, 2020) (available at: <https://www.phoenix-center.org/perspectives/Perspective20-07Final.pdf>); G.S. Ford, *Are Broadband Prices Rising? The Perils of Naïve Price Comparisons*, PHOENIX CENTER POLICY PERSPECTIVE No. 26-02 (February 23, 2026) (available at: <https://phoenix-center.org/perspectives/Perspective26-02Final.pdf>).

² See, e.g., J.B. Horrigan, *Broadband Prices Increased in 2025*, Benton Institute for Broadband & Society (January 12, 2026) (available at: <https://www.benton.org/blog/broadband-prices-increased-2025>).

³ Data available at: <https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/CPIAUCSL>.

⁴ Note that I include 24 Mbps in the 25 Mbps tier and include 940 Mbps and 987 Mbps in the 1000 Mbps tier.

⁵ Recall that these are real prices with a 2025 base; the nominal price for 25 Mbps in 2019 was \$65.26.

⁶ The natural log of real price is regressed on a 2025 dummy or a trend with speed and state fixed effects. The regression is weighted. Standard errors are clustered on state.

⁷ Holding p constant, the calculation is $[(p/1000)/(p/100)]^{1/6} - 1$.

⁸ Comcast's download speed was 987 Mbps in 2020, which is labeled in the table as 1,000 Mbps.

⁹ The growth rate is calculated by regressing the natural log of download speed on a time trend and including fixed effects for the price tier and state. The regression is weighted. The coefficient on year is 0.262 (state cluster robust $p < 0.001$).