

FiOS: MYTH OR REALITY IN THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA?

The United States has long been challenged over the availability and rapid deployment of advanced broadband services, particularly given such services are readily obtainable in Europe and Asia – at much cheaper prices than offered in the U.S. Indeed, a recent Washington Post article cited that Japan’s broadband technology is running at “warp-speed,” with speeds from 8 to 30 times as fast as in the U.S. In addition, DSL in Japan is often 5 to 19 times faster than what is widely offered by U.S. cable providers.¹

Based on such reports and in light of recent media stories that some Maryland and Virginia communities directly outside the District are seeing rapidly increasing installation of Verizon’s FiOS Internet and TV services, the Office of the People’s Counsel has received numerous inquiries from interested District ratepayers wondering when, and if, FiOS will become available in the District of Columbia. Although DSL is more readily available, it is not available everywhere in D.C. due to technical limitations of the copper wire, *i.e.*, if a consumer lives too far from the central office, DSL is not available.

What is FiOS?

FiOS stands for Fiber Optic Service and is a broadband service delivering telephone, Internet, and TV over a fiber optic network instead of copper telephone lines. According to technology experts, the fiber optic network allows for faster delivery of service than DSL or other advanced broadband technology. Television and Internet services are offered over the same fiber optic lines.

How is FiOS Installed?

FiOS’ fiber optic service lines come straight to the house, completely separate from existing copper telephone lines. A telephone company such as Verizon must lay the fiber in the ground or overhead on telephone poles alongside other wires. According to Verizon, underground installation is more costly.

Where is FiOS available?

Verizon FiOS is currently available in 16 states: Maryland, Virginia, Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, California, Florida, Indiana, Oregon, Texas, and Washington state. However, Verizon FiOS is only available in certain areas (all suburban) and is not widely available throughout the state, particularly in densely populated urban areas.

Is FiOS available in the District of Columbia?

No. FiOS is not available in the District.

When will Verizon offer FiOS in D.C.?

Based on the Office’s request for information regarding the deployment of FiOS in the District, Verizon DC Vice President, Hank Ambrose said, “Building a network as complex and far-reaching as our FiOS network takes time, and it will take awhile to get to all areas in which we will eventually deploy. The deployment of FiOS in the District will be based on whether it is a prudent business decision for Verizon.”

¹ Blaine Harden, “Japan’s Warp-Speed Ride to Internet Future,” Washington Post, August 29, 2007, at A1.

How do I use FiOS?

As with VoIP, there is no special equipment necessary to operate the FiOS services. Once FiOS is installed, you will be able to get services over your computer, TV or telephone.

Will I lose FiOS if the power goes out?

One of the primary benefits of a landline — having a phone connection during a power outage — will be duplicated with FiOS by a battery backup lasting up to 8 hours. However, after 8 hours, FiOS services most likely will be interrupted.

Will FiOS interfere with my home security system?

Home security systems should not be compromised by the installation of FiOS services since the services are not being carried over the same service line.

Will Verizon remove traditional copper wires?

In most cases, customers may be able to keep the landline copper wires, particularly since Verizon continues to offer DSL Internet through the copper wires. In the event the copper wires are removed, according to Verizon spokesperson Harry Mitchell, “[i]f someone who has switched over to FiOS wants to switch back to copper wires, Verizon will install the wires at no cost to the customer.”

What can concerned citizens do who want FiOS in D.C.?

Contact Verizon, and let your voice be heard. The Office encourages interested residents to contact the Company directly regarding its deployment plans.