

The consortium has almost 40 member campuses, including the University of Chicago and California Institute of Technology. A month later, Blair Levin spoke at a conference in San Jose, California. "Here's a big fact," he declared. "For the first time since the beginning of the commercial Internet, the United States does not have a national wireline provider with plans to build a better network than the currently best available network."

This is not news to us. In late May, Ars's Timothy Lee outlined [four signs](#) that the US's national broadband policy is failing, among them Verizon's announcement that it would put the kibosh on fiber-to-the-premises rollouts, "without reaching some of its most important markets, including Baltimore, downtown Boston, and my own apartment in Philadelphia."

The regional Bell operating companies don't seem to be in a rush to pick up the slack, either—fiberwise. "Instead of an arms race between telephone and cable incumbents, we seem to be getting a truce," Lee noted.

But it's an ominous sign, Levin suggested. It means that there's no fire under the feet of the cable industry to go to the next level (instead, Verizon and Comcast are negotiating [spectrum deals](#), speaking of truces). And *that* means that for most Americans, "five years from now, the best network they have is the network they have today."

It's true that there's still a lot of innovation in wireless, but "looking down the road, only wireline can provide the excessive bandwidth that provides the platform for creating the next generation of big bandwidth services," he added.

So the big question isn't just about rollouts, it's about upgrades.

## **Bandwidth psychology**

"When it comes to the wireline access network, instead of talking about upgrades, we are talking about caps and tiers," Levin warned. "The government should not attempt to micromanage the packaging

or pricing of a service. But those in policy positions should understand this: a country that is talking about an upgrade, and not caps, will be better off in a few years; a country that is talking about caps, and not upgrades, will not be better off in a few years, and likely will be worse off." The speech then framed the choices for future policy makers: