



**AT&T:**  
Abandoning Rural & Other  
Communities in Indiana



And without competitive choice for high-speed Internet, monopoly cable charges high prices and delivers poor customer service.

This report documents the network problems that lead to service problems for customers and public safety hazards. Quality service depends on adequate staffing of trained, career employees. But over the last two years, AT&T has cut its Indiana workforce.

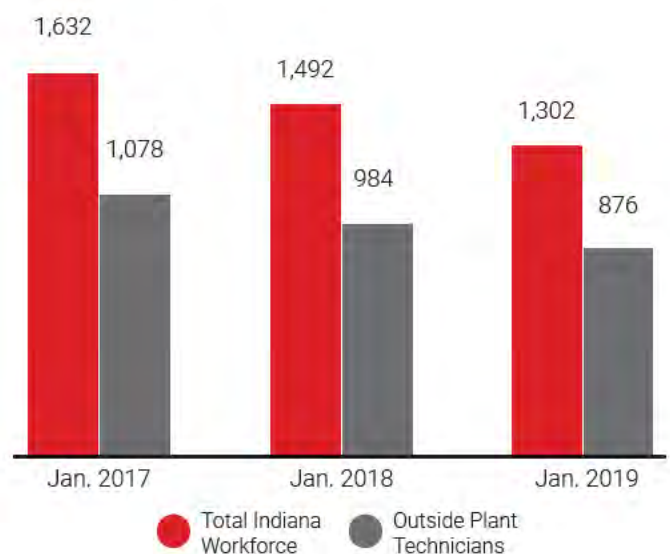
- Between Jan. 2017 and Jan. 2019, AT&T reduced its outside plant technicians in Indiana by 19 percent, dropping from 1,078 technicians in the state to just 876.
- Over the last two years, AT&T reduced its total Indiana workforce – outside technicians, inside technicians, call center workers, and administrative staff – by 20 percent, from 1,632 to 1,302 workers across the state.

**AT&T is abandoning rural Indiana and many urban and suburban communities in the state.** AT&T has a statutory responsibility to provide adequate and safe voice service throughout the state.<sup>1</sup> Yet through systemic disrepair of its traditional landline network, many Indiana customers can no longer rely on AT&T to meet its obligation to provide reliable telecommunications service.

In Indiana, AT&T has focused its resources on building its all-fiber network to select neighborhoods in the Bloomington, Indianapolis, South Bend, and Gary metro areas.<sup>2</sup> It is also upgrading its wireless network. CWA supports these investments. However, AT&T's all-fiber deployment is limited to 12 million customer locations nationwide, representing only a fraction of the customer locations in its 21-state wireline footprint.<sup>3</sup> Every Indiana community needs access to quality wireline and wireless networks, including competitive choice among high-speed broadband providers.

In many communities, AT&T voice service is a lifeline for customers. Wireless service is spotty and more expensive than wireline. Wireless service also depends on well-maintained wireline networks. In many suburban and urban neighborhoods in Indiana, AT&T has not upgraded its traditional copper network to fiber. Slow DSL does not provide the Internet capacity families and businesses need to access today's data-intensive online video services.

### In the Last Two Years, AT&T Cut its Indiana Workforce by 20%



AT&T has gutted its workforce across the Midwest. Between Jan. 2017 and Jan. 2019, AT&T reduced its outside plant technicians across Ohio, Michigan, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Illinois by 23 percent, dropping from 6,519 technicians to just 5,037. AT&T reduced its total Midwest wireline workforce by 23 percent, from 10,651 to 8,165 workers.

**AT&T's network in rural and many urban and suburban neighborhoods is in disrepair.**

In Indiana and communities across the Midwest, copper cable, for many the only source of landline phone and Internet, is significantly damaged. The result is poor quality service and recurring service problems. But AT&T is not replacing damaged cable, opting instead for temporary fixes that treat the symptom but not the disease. For example, when it rains water can get into the cable and cause static on the phone line or an outage. By the time AT&T sends an outside plant technician to address the customer complaint, often the cable has dried and service is restored. The same issue will happen the next time it rains. Rather than replacing the cable, which is labor-intensive and time-consuming, AT&T instructs its employees to fix problems quickly with temporary solutions and move on to the next project. The public can see this in the black and orange plastic bags littering AT&T's plant. These bags are designed to provide a short-term solution to damaged cable and equipment. Too often, the issues never get a permanent fix. The plastic bags deteriorate, leaving wires exposed and causing further deterioration, leading to service problems for customers.

CWA, as part of its on-going obligation to its members, conducted an investigation at AT&T facilities serviced by CWA members. The investigation focused on the condition of outside plant (readily observable from public streets and sidewalks) in the areas of Indiana. In the course of its investigation, CWA uncovered numerous instances of facilities throughout Indiana in a dangerous state of disrepair that pose service and safety hazards. CWA has documented some of the most blatant effects of these practices and policies through



photographs of AT&T facilities in plain sight from public areas throughout AT&T's service area.

Indiana largely deregulated public oversight of the telecommunications industry with the passage of Senate Bill No. 245 in 2006.<sup>4</sup> Deregulation proponents argued that competition could replace regulatory protections that held AT&T accountable for the quality of its service and, by extension, the condition of its network. But as the evidence in this report makes clear, eliminating public oversight has not ensured that AT&T meet its statutory obligation to provide adequate and safe service to everyone in Indiana.

**The AT&T network disrepair is a sign of deferred maintenance and insufficient investment.** As the photos indicate, and a survey of CWA members confirms, AT&T has been inattentive to poor plant conditions and has not been investing the necessary resources to properly maintain its copper network, which is often the only means of modern communication for rural, elderly, and other consumers. This systemic disrepair results in poor quality and repeat service complaints, such as when there is static on a phone line when it rains due to damaged cable. In many instances, it also leads to safety concerns like animals nesting in damaged terminals, exposed wires, or damaged telephone poles.

In the course of representing its members, CWA convened a roundtable of outside plant technicians from across the Midwest to learn about systemic problems at AT&T. AT&T's garages, the members say, are not stocking the necessary equipment to maintain the network.. These workers discussed AT&T's rigid project timekeeping system that prevents them from taking the time necessary to do a thorough repair of damaged cable or equipment. For example, if a serious problem takes more than a few hours to fix, managers encourage the workers to find a temporary solution or face disciplinary action. The result is insufficient fixes, like brittle plastic bags placed over splice boxes, leading to further plant deterioration and future issues.

**Most important, CWA members explained that they want to do their jobs to provide good service – but they need the equipment, time, and adequate staffing to do so.**

AT&T's failure to invest in its landline network in Indiana and elsewhere is particularly egregious in light of the \$21 billion tax windfall that AT&T received from the federal *Tax Cut and Jobs Act* of 2017. During the debate over the legislation, AT&T CEO Randall Stephenson promised to use tax cuts to increase capital investment and create thousands of new jobs. AT&T got its tax cut – amounting to \$3 billion in 2018 alone – but slashed its capital investment the same year by \$1.4 billion. Since 2017, AT&T has cut more than 23,000 jobs.<sup>5</sup>

**AT&T must invest in its network in rural and many urban and suburban areas to provide quality service to its customers in Indiana.**

On the following pages are photos and descriptions documenting the systemic disrepair of AT&T's Indiana plant.

## AT&T Copper Plant Photos – Indiana

1. This photo from West 25th Street, Anderson, IN, shows a damaged pedestal on its side next to a public street. Wires are exposed to damage from weather and animals. Damaged wires cause service outages. In addition, the exposed wires are a public safety hazard.



2. This photo from Christian Avenue, Noblesville, IN, shows a double-pole. The old pole (right, with a white spray-painted X) with only AT&T equipment attached to it is tied to the new pole with rope to prevent it from falling. AT&T has not moved its facilities to the new utility pole. As a result, AT&T's equipment remains connected to old, deteriorating poles, causing potential service and safety concerns.



3. This photo from M Street, Bedford, IN, shows an unsecured terminal. The terminal should be secured to the pole, not tied to the cable. The terminal can fill with water, deteriorating wires and leading to service issues. In addition, the terminal is wrapped shut with electrical tape, which is not designed to keep a terminal closed. This presents a serious public safety hazard.



4. This photo from West 32nd Street, Marion, IN, shows unsecured cables. The cables should be secured to the utility pole. The wind blows the unsecured service cables, damaging the copper inside the wire and causing service issues. In addition, these cables are within reach of passersby, causing a public safety hazard.



5. This photo from Lincoln Avenue, Bedford, IN, shows an unsecured terminal hanging from service wires. The terminal should be secured to the pole. The terminal can fill with water, deteriorating wires and leading to service issues. A hanging terminal presents a public safety hazard.



6. This photo from Helmsburg Road, Nashville, IN, shows a double-pole. The old pole (right) is significantly damaged and leaning, putting strain on AT&T's cables and equipment, which remain attached. Despite the state of this utility pole, AT&T has not moved its facilities to the new pole. As a result, AT&T's equipment remains connected to an old, damaged pole, causing potential service and safety concerns.



7. This photo from West 5th Street, Marion, IN, shows a damaged pedestal. Its protective cover is missing. It is partially covered by a deteriorated black plastic covering. Wires are exposed to damage from weather and animals. Damaged wires cause service outages. In addition, the exposed wires are a public safety hazard.



8. This photo from Town Hill Road, Nashville, IN, shows an improperly secured cable. Instead of being properly lashed, this cable is tied to a lash with a piece of rope (yellow arrow). The wind blows the unsecured service cables, damaging the copper inside the wire and causing service issues.





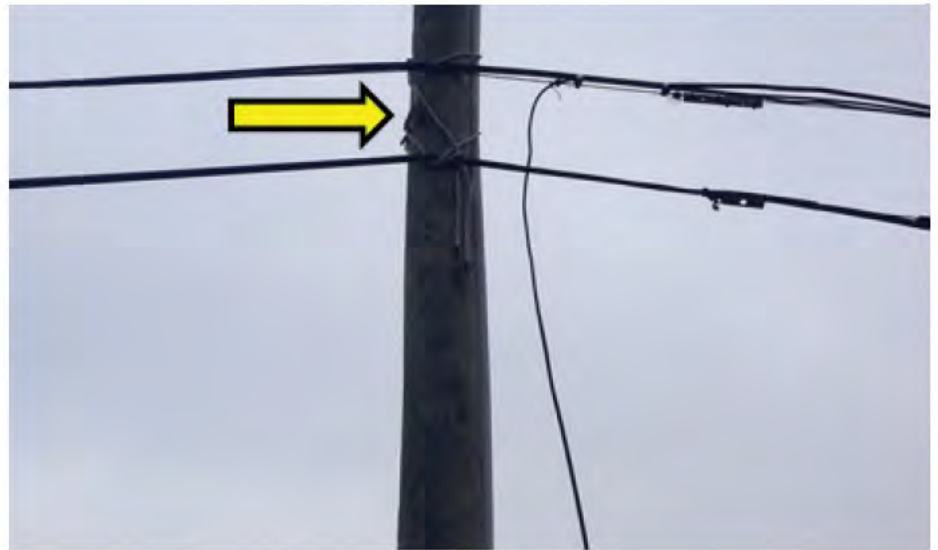
9. This photo from Maple Avenue, Noblesville, IN, shows a double-pole. The old pole (left) has only AT&T equipment attached to it. AT&T has not moved its facilities to the new utility pole. As a result, AT&T's equipment remains connected to an old, deteriorating pole, causing potential service and safety concerns.



10. This photo from 17th Street, Bedford, IN, shows an unsecured terminal hanging from service wires. The terminal should be secured to the pole. The terminal can fill with water, deteriorating wires and leading to service issues. A hanging terminal presents a public safety hazard.



11. This photo from Sandpit Road, Bedford, IN, shows improperly secured cables. The cables are tied to the utility pole with rope (yellow arrow), which will eventually deteriorate, leaving the cables unsecured. The wind blows the unsecured cables, damaging the copper inside the wire and causing service issues.



12. This photo from East SR 46, Bloomington, IN, shows a hanging pole, or a double-pole that has been cut before AT&T moved its facilities to the new pole. The old utility pole was cut with AT&T's terminal and cables still attached to it. Left dangling, the old pole strains the cables and endangers the public. It is a service, worker, and public safety concern.



13. This photo from Jefferson Street, Anderson, IN, shows improperly secured wires. The wires are tied around the utility pole. They will eventually deteriorate, leaving the wires unsecured. The wind blows the unsecured wires, damaging the copper inside the wire and causing service issues.



14. This photo from Boone Hollow Road, Bedford, IN, shows a double-pole. The old pole (left) with only AT&T equipment attached to it is tied to the new pole to prevent it from falling. AT&T has not moved its facilities to the new utility pole. As a result, AT&T's equipment remains connected to an old, deteriorating pole, causing potential service and safety concerns.



15. This photo from South Walnut Street, Bloomington, IN, shows a double-pole. The old pole (right, with a white spray-painted X) has only AT&T equipment attached to it. AT&T has not moved its facilities to the new utility pole. As a result, AT&T's equipment remains connected to an old, deteriorating pole, causing potential service and safety concerns.



16. This photo from East 10th Street, Bloomington, IN, shows a damaged pedestal on its side next to a public street. Wires are exposed to damage from weather and animals. Damaged wires cause service outages. In addition, the exposed wires are a public safety hazard.



17. This photo from Sandpit Road, Bedford, IN, shows an unsecured terminal hanging from service wires. The terminal should be secured to the pole. The terminal can fill with water, deteriorating wires and leading to service issues. A hanging terminal presents a public safety hazard.



18. This photo from SR 135, Nashville, IN, shows a damaged pedestal. Its protective cover is missing. Wires are exposed to damage from weather and animals. Damaged wires cause service outages. In addition, the exposed wires are a public safety hazard.



19. This photo from Bloomington, IN, shows an unsecured terminal. The terminal should be secured to the pole, not tied to the cable. The terminal can fill with water, deteriorating wires and leading to service issues. In addition, the terminal is wrapped shut with electrical tape, which is not designed to keep a terminal shut. This presents a serious public safety hazard.



20. This photo from Bloomington, IN, shows an unsecured terminal hanging from service wires. The terminal should be secured to the pole. The terminal can fill with water, deteriorating wires and leading to service issues. In addition, a hanging terminal presents a public safety hazard.



21. This photo from Claylick Road, Nashville, IN, shows a double-pole. The old pole (right, with a white spray-painted X) has only AT&T equipment attached to it. AT&T has not moved its facilities to the new utility pole. As a result, AT&T's equipment remains connected to old, deteriorating poles, causing potential service and safety concerns.



22. This photo from Diamond Road, Heltonville, IN, shows an unsecured terminal hanging from service wires. The terminal should be secured to the pole. The terminal case is also open, exposing wires to water. Water deteriorates the wires, leading to service issues. In addition, a hanging terminal presents a public safety hazard.



23. This photo from Tunnelton Road, Nashville, IN, shows improperly secured wires. The wires are tied around the utility pole. They will eventually deteriorate, leaving the wires unsecured. The wind blows the unsecured wires, damaging the copper inside the wire and causing service issues.





## Endnotes

1. Indiana Code 8-1-2-54; IC 8-1-4-69.
2. According to AT&T, it is also building fiber in the following Indiana locations: Jefferson, New Albany, Noblesville, Carmel, Fishers, Brownsburn, Lawrence, Greenfield, Plainfield, Michigan City, Hammond, Munster, St. John, Crown Point, Merrillville, and Evansville. A full list of AT&T's fiber cities is available at <https://www.att.com/shop/internet/gigapower/coverage-map.html>.
3. AT&T Q1 2019 Earnings Report, p. 47: <https://otp.tools.investis.com/clients/us/atnt2/sec/sec-show.aspx?FilingId=13407259&Cik=0000732717&Type=PDF&hasPdf=1>Text of the bill is available at: <https://www.legiscan.com/OH/bill/HB402/2017>.
4. A summary of the bill from Indiana's General Assembly is available here: <https://www.in.gov/apps/lisa/session/billwatch/billinfo?year=2006&session=1&request=getBill&docno=245>.
5. Communications Workers of America, "AT&T Jobs Report Update" (May 2019). Available at: <https://cwa-union.org/sites/default/files/20190508-cwa-att-jobs-report-update.pdf>.

**CWA**

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