



Uniti Group (UNIT)

Updated May 13th, 2023 by Samuel Smith

Key Metrics

Current Price:	\$3.7	5 Year CAGR Estimate:	21.4%	Market Cap:	\$811M
Fair Value Price:	\$6.0	5 Year Growth Estimate:	2.4%	Ex-Dividend Date:	6/15/23
% Fair Value:	62%	5 Year Valuation Multiple Estimate:	10.2%	Dividend Payment Date:	6/30/23
Dividend Yield:	16.2%	5 Year Price Target	\$7	Years Of Dividend Growth:	0
Dividend Risk Score:	D	Retirement Suitability Score:	B	Rating:	Buy

Overview & Current Events

Uniti Group is a Real Estate Investment Trust (i.e., REIT) that focuses on acquiring, constructing, and leasing out communications infrastructure in the United States. In particular, it owns millions of miles of fiber strand along with other communications real estate. In its recent past it has faced challenges due to its largest tenant filing for bankruptcy and renegotiating its lease with Uniti. However, the REIT is now on firmer footing and is pursuing growth opportunities. On May 4th, Uniti Group reported Q1 results. Uniti reported revenues of \$289.8 million. Adjusted Funds From Operations (AFFO) attributable to common shareholders was \$107.4 million, or \$0.39 per diluted common share. Uniti Fiber, a subsidiary of the company, contributed \$79.0 million in revenues and \$33.7 million in adjusted EBITDA for the first quarter. They achieved an adjusted EBITDA margin of approximately 43%. Uniti Fiber also had success-based capital expenditures of \$36.1 million during the quarter. Uniti Leasing, another subsidiary, contributed \$210.8 million in revenues and \$205.0 million in adjusted EBITDA for the first quarter. They deployed capital expenditures of \$71.7 million, mainly for constructing about 1,200 new route miles of valuable fiber infrastructure.

Growth on a Per-Share Basis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028
AFFO/S			\$1.78	\$2.61	\$2.51	\$2.51	\$2.08	\$1.72	\$1.68	\$1.75	\$1.20	\$1.35
DPS			\$1.64	\$2.40	\$2.40	\$2.40	\$0.00	\$0.60	\$0.60	\$0.60	\$0.60	\$0.60
Shares¹			150.5	155.8	175.4	183.1	193.3	232.9	236.3	237.3	238.6	240.0

Since the IPO in 2015, Uniti Group has struggled to grow AFFO per share as it has been weighed down by a heavy debt burden and significant troubles with a very large tenant. Eventually it was forced to renegotiate its lease and as a result has taken a hit to cash flows. However, the REIT is on much firmer footing today and is looking to reignite growth.

It is primarily working to drive this growth through refinancing its debt at significantly lower rates in order to generate increased cash flow from existing revenue streams while also leasing up its under-utilized assets. In the near-term, however, higher interest rates are delaying this tailwind, resulting in the large decline in AFFO per share expected in 2023. By adding leasing to its assets it can generate extremely high returns on investment capital as additional customers require minimal additional capital expenditures, but bring in strong cash flows. As a result, we expect Uniti Group to generate 2.4% annualized AFFO per share growth over the next half decade off of this year's lows.

Valuation Analysis

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Now	2028
P/AFFO			11.0	10.5	9.7	7.4	6.3	4.0	6.8	8.3	3.1	5.0
Avg. Yld.			8.4%	8.8%	9.9%	12.9%	0.0%	8.7%	5.3%	4.1%	16.2%	8.9%

Uniti Group has traded at mid to high single digit P/AFFO multiples for most of its existence. That said, today it trades at a low single-digit P/AFFO multiple.

¹ In millions

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With Uniti poised to grow AFFO per share at a steady clip moving forward while interest rates are rising, we assign a fair value P/AFFO multiple of 5x, which should provide a meaningful tailwind to total returns moving forward.

Safety, Quality, Competitive Advantage, & Recession Resiliency

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2028
Payout			92%	92%	96%	96%	0%	35%	36%	34%	50%	44%

While Uniti Group's balance sheet is far from rock solid, it is on firmer footing and continuing to improve as management works to refinance debt to improve the maturity ladder as well as reduce interest costs. Furthermore, the trust is retaining a lot of cash right now thanks to the low payout ratio which it is using to deleverage and pursue growth opportunities which should in turn reduce leverage further.

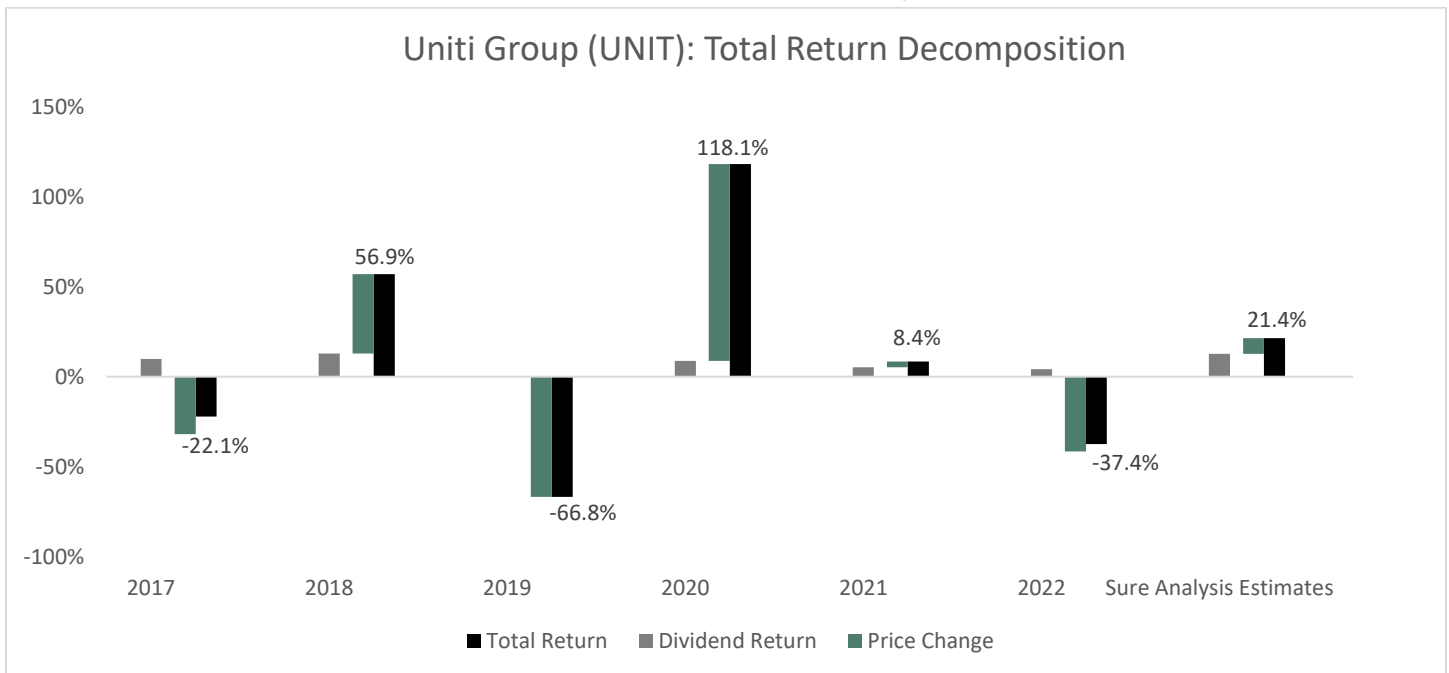
Uniti's fiber assets are critical infrastructure in the regions in which it operates and therefore the REIT should enjoy fairly stable cash flows in the face of a recession. While its assets are mission critical, there is nothing unique about Uniti Group that gives it a durable competitive advantage. As a result, it lacks meaningful pricing power and therefore is unlikely to drive abnormally high profitability over time. The main source of total returns will be a combination of its stable cash flowing business model and multiple expansion to compensation for the current deep discount in shares.

Given the low payout ratio, significant growth upside, and the mission critical and recession resistant nature of Uniti's assets, the dividend looks safe for the foreseeable future.

Final Thoughts & Recommendation

Uniti Group offers investors very attractive total return potential thanks to its sky-high dividend yield, growth potential, and deeply discounted valuation. That said, it is a fairly speculative investment due to its high leverage burden. As a result, we rate it a Speculative Buy.

Total Return Breakdown by Year



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Income Statement Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Revenue	45	36		770	916	1,018	1,058	1,067	1,101	1,129
Gross Profit	22	17								
Gross Margin	48.5%	47.1%		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
SG&A Exp.	0	0		35	72	85	103	105	101	101
D&A Exp.				376	434	452	406	329	291	293
Operating Profit	17	12		309	308	344	389	473	562	592
Operating Margin	36.6%	34.1%		40.2%	33.6%	33.8%	36.8%	44.4%	51.0%	52.4%
Net Profit	17	12		(0)	(9)	16	11	(706)	124	(8)
Net Margin	36.6%	34.1%		0.0%	-1.0%	1.6%	1.0%	-66.2%	11.2%	-0.7%
Free Cash Flow				341	239	49	267	(160)	113	33
Income Tax				1	(39)	(5)	5	(15)	(5)	(17)

Balance Sheet Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Total Assets	22	17	2,543	3,319	4,330	4,593	5,017	4,732	4,809	4,851
Cash & Equivalents			142	172	60	38	143	78	59	44
Accounts Receivable	3	2	14	44	91	166	80	76	80	111
Goodwill & Int. Ass.	19	14	11	423	1,103	1,125	1,223	993	967	696
Total Liabilities	10	8	3,710	4,641	5,454	6,000	6,500	6,804	6,923	7,122
Accounts Payable			10	41	78	94	227	146	87	122
Long-Term Debt	-	-		4,028	4,483	4,846	5,018	4,817	5,091	5,189
Shareholder's Equity	12	9	(1,167)	(1,402)	(1,309)	(1,586)	(1,567)	(2,142)	(2,128)	(2,274)
LTD/E Ratio	-	-		(3.05)	(3.66)	(3.23)	(3.20)	(2.25)	(2.39)	(2.28)

Profitability & Per Share Metrics

Year	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Return on Assets		63.8%		0.0%	-0.2%	0.4%	0.2%	-14.5%	2.6%	-0.2%
Return on Equity		117.0%								
ROIC		117.0%		0.0%	-0.3%	0.5%	0.3%	-22.5%	4.3%	-0.3%
Shares Out.			150.5	155.8	175.4	183.1	193.3	232.9	236.3	235.8
Revenue/Share	0.30	0.24		5.05	5.42	5.75	5.64	5.24	4.17	4.79
FCF/Share				2.24	1.42	0.28	1.42	(0.79)	0.43	0.14

Note: All figures in millions of U.S. Dollars unless per share or indicated otherwise.

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