



# AN UPDATE ON FIRSTNET

Revolutionizing public safety through technology

By Mark Ryckman, ICMA-CM, and Andrew Delaney

**L**ocal government managers are aware that automated systems can assist in improving local service delivery. From coordinated traffic signal systems to utility readers, automation can improve efficiencies and enable local governments to better serve the public. Without the necessary technology, this level of automation is simply not possible.

Just as communities require physical infrastructure like water and sewer systems or highways and interstates, our communities now require technology infrastructure to advance in today's world. Reliable, high-speed broadband is arguably among the most important.

Many of you are likely reading this article on your laptop or mobile device at home, in a coffee shop, or on an airplane—literally anywhere in the world. It has become commonplace to have an abundance of information at our

fingertips so that we barely notice all the ways we rely upon it now—except when we don't have access.

## Ensuring Information Access for Public Safety Agencies

Unfortunately, not having reliable access to data communications is a regular occurrence for public-safety officials and first responders—especially in areas with poor coverage or during times of substantial congestion over commercial networks.

Public-safety agencies today are increasingly more reliant upon technology as they operate in an environment where they're asked to do much more, with much less. Congress authorized FirstNet in 2012 to deploy, operate, and maintain the first high-speed, nationwide, wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety.

The law provided \$7 billion and 20 megahertz of long-term evolution (LTE) spectrum in the 700 MHz band for this

network. This is “prime” spectrum with superior building penetration and rural coverage characteristics, which is ideally suited to the mission of public safety.

The nation's public-safety personnel operate in a mobile environment. When responding to an incident they need to have immediate access to all of their lifesaving tools, including communications. FirstNet will ensure that emergency management services, fire services, law enforcement personnel, and other emergency managers have access to a wide range of information via a reliable broadband communications network.

Body cameras, in-vehicle computers, smartphone applications, medical data, and photos and video en route to fires are just a few of the innovative tools gaining rapid adoption. The real value of all this technology is to empower the first responder in the field and improve safety, situational awareness, and efficiency.

## Progress Toward Deployment

A key milestone in the implementation process was the release of FirstNet's Request for Proposals (RFP)<sup>1</sup> earlier this year to find an industry partner. The successful partner will be responsible for assisting FirstNet in building and maintaining the network in return for use of the excess network capacity.

With the RFP, FirstNet will create a "first of its kind," nationwide, public-private partnership and deploy the best, most cost-effective network. Responses to the RFP were due May 31, 2016, and FirstNet anticipates issuing a contract award by the end of 2016 with network operations beginning in 2018.

The state plan development process, which began in 2014 with data collection and initial consultation meetings with states and territories,<sup>2</sup> continues to this day. Using this information, FirstNet is planning to present state plan drafts to each state and territory in concert with our industry partner.

Once the plans are finalized, FirstNet expects to deliver all 56 plans simultaneously to each governor. This will begin the 90-day review and decision period<sup>3</sup> as specified in the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012.

The decision identifies whether FirstNet or the state/territory takes on the responsibility to deploy, operate, and maintain the Radio Access Network (RAN). Regardless of the state/territory decision, the RAN must interconnect with the national FirstNet core network.

## Involving Stakeholders

FirstNet has spent a tremendous amount of time focused on outreach to stakeholders and public safety. Last year, it conducted more than 300 events with more than 46,000 attendees across all 56 states and territories, as well as tribal nations.

These consultation meetings allowed FirstNet officials to listen and learn as they move towards network deployment. In 2016, FirstNet continued its consultation efforts through more targeted meetings with state, local, tribal, and federal public-safety agencies to prepare for state plan delivery.

The Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), is composed of 42 representatives from public-safety, state, territory, local, and tribal organizations, including ICMA.

Established in 2013, PSAC members assist FirstNet on a voluntary basis to ensure public safety's voice is heard in the development of the network. For more information, check out the FirstNet PSAC Factsheet.<sup>4</sup>

## Get Involved

In order for FirstNet to be a success, input from local government managers is needed. For those of you who are just learning about FirstNet or would like to get more engaged, information can be found at [www.firstnet.gov](http://www.firstnet.gov).

The consultation team also has recently added new members who cover specific states and regions, focused on meeting your needs and addressing your concerns.

Local government managers should continue to prepare for the deployment of the FirstNet network and to learn how it can assist public-safety agencies to provide more cost-effective services. Your participation will be critical to informing key decisions that will be made about implementation of the network. This includes the state or territory's adoption of FirstNet's plan for the build-out of the Radio Access Network (RAN) in the state or territory.

FirstNet is committed to ensuring the network uses the latest technology and offers the best service to public safety. With your help, FirstNet will be able to meet public safety's critical communication needs. **PM**

## ENDNOTES

- <http://www.firstnet.gov/news/firstnet-issues-rfp-nationwide-public-safety-broadband-network>.
- <http://www.firstnet.gov/consultation>.
- [www.firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/factors-governor-decision.pdf](http://www.firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/factors-governor-decision.pdf).
- [www.firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/PSAC%20Fact%20Sheet\\_050316.pdf](http://www.firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/PSAC%20Fact%20Sheet_050316.pdf).



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A session on FirstNet will be held at ICMA's 2016 Annual Conference in Kansas City, Missouri, September 25–28.