

NTIA OFFICIAL PROVIDES TIMELINES FOR NATIONWIDE BROADBAND NETWORK

Mar 20, 2012 11:07 AM, By Donny Jackson (donald.jackson@penton.com)

It could be at least a year before construction on the nationwide, 700 MHz LTE network for public safety begins, because the governance and planning work for the massive project must be completed first, according to an official for the **National Telecommunications and Information Administration** (NTIA).

NTIA has until Aug. 20 to establish the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet), the 15-member board that will make policy decisions regarding the public-safety broadband network, said Anna Gomez, NTIA's deputy assistant secretary, during last week's **Urgent Communications webinar** sponsored by **Cassidian Communications**. After FirstNet is created, it has to create a public-safety advisory committee, establish resources, develop a request for inquiry (RFI) and consult with designated agents for each state before releasing a request for proposal (RFP).

The new law does not stipulate a time frame for the RFP process, but Gomez said NTIA plans to "move full-speed ahead" with the tasks — although she does not believe this step can be completed quickly.

"It's a pretty good guess that it's going to take several months," Gomez said during the webinar, an archive of which **is available here**.

After the RFP is released, governors will have 90 days to accept the plan or choose to opt out of the nationwide buildout to plan construction of the LTE network in their states. While this is an option, states choosing to opt out of the nationwide plan must submit their own plan within six months and get FCC approval before they can begin construction. In addition, they will have to provide a 20% match to federal funds for the deployment — operational expenses will not be covered — something that will not be required of states following the FirstNet plan.

When asked whether states choosing to opt out of the nationwide plan will pay more and see a deployment delay, Gomez said, "I would say that's not unlikely."

Of course, the first deployments in this private LTE network are expected to be completed this year, as several 700 MHz waiver recipients are scheduled to build out 700 MHz broadband systems with federal stimulus grant money. **Public Safety Spectrum Trust** (PSST) Chairman Harlin McEwen said he has been working with the FCC and NTIA to ensure a smooth transition of the public-safety broadband license from the PSST to FirstNet.

McEwen said he believes it is “very unlikely” that the FCC will approve any new 700 MHz broadband waivers before the license is transferred to FirstNet.

Perhaps the most controversial portion of the new law is a requirement that public-safety entities must vacate the T-Band spectrum in the 470-512 MHz range. Mobile wireless consultant **Andrew Seybold** emphasized that the key for agencies operating on this spectrum is “don’t panic.”

Public-safety officials are trying to convince the FCC to waive the narrowbanding mandate for T-Band agencies, in part because the purpose of narrowbanding — clearing additional spectrum for public safety to use — would not happen in the T-Band, Seybold said. But a more important reason that T-Band agencies should not narrowband is to ensure that scarce financial resources are used most efficiently — in this case, to help pay for the buildout of a LTE network, according to Charles Dowd, deputy chief for the New York City Police Department.

“Why would we want to invest \$100 million to \$200 million to narrowband a UHF T-Band system, if the spectrum is going to be taken away from us at some point?” Dowd said. “Unless your system is at its end of life, the idea of just narrowbanding it for the sake of narrowbanding — to us — doesn’t make a lot of sense.”

Related stories

- Commentary: **Nationwide network has public safety scrambling for answers**
- Commentary: **New public-safety network is story like no other**
- **PSA celebrates broadband-network victory**
- **GAO: Mission-critical voice over broadband not in the near future**
- **NYPD: New T-band rules should alter FCC’s narrowbanding mandate**