

NTIA Says FCC Should License 10 x 10 Broadband Channels for Public Safety (8/28/12)

By Sandra Wendelken

National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) officials asked the FCC to reconsider one aspect of its order allowing public-safety agencies to launch broadband services under special temporary authority (STA) rules. In a letter, NTIA said authorizing 10 x 10 megahertz allocations instead of the planned 5 x 5 megahertz allocations will provide increased performance, interoperability, cost effectiveness and long-term usefulness.

The FCC July 31 [adopted an order to allow limited deployment of public-safety broadband services in the existing public-safety broadband spectrum \(763 – 768/793 – 798 MHz\)](#) under the commission's STA rules. However, the order permits deployments only in the existing public-safety broadband spectrum, while NTIA wants the STA authority to include the entire 20 megahertz of spectrum that incorporates the D block allocated to the First Responder Network (FirstNet) authority, which NTIA oversees.

Larry Strickling, assistant secretary of commerce for communications and information, said in the letter there are several reasons NTIA wants the FCC to reconsider its decision. First, effective public-safety broadband communications requires the entire 10 x 10 megahertz of spectrum for capacity reasons. Second, although Third Generation Partnership Project (3GPP) standards provide a mechanism whereby user equipment can transition from 5- to 10-megahertz channel size, not all potential public-safety user equipment conforms to 3GPP specifications, and interoperability could be hampered.

“NTIA believes that it would be costly, time consuming and technically challenging to transition a system based on 5-megahertz channels to 10-megahertz channels as will be required for compatibility with the nationwide network,” said the letter. “A vendor has yet to demonstrate a streamlined path for this upgrade that could possibly be managed for efficient network launch.”

At the Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) International conference Aug. 21, Public Safety Communications Research (PSCR) staff said they are upgrading all vendor and laboratory equipment for the public-safety broadband demonstration network to the 10 x 10 megahertz channels. "It required all vendors to update to larger systems," said Emil Olbrich, PSCR lead project engineer. "It was not as easy as we expected."

Harris County, Texas, deployed public-safety Long Term Evolution (LTE) equipment that is capable of using the 10 x 10 spectrum allocated to public safety with a firmware upgrade to the radios currently installed. "The expense is minimal, and we have already done some of the preliminary work in anticipation of approval from the FCC," said Robert Cavazos, director of broadband services for Harris County ITC mobility. "My understanding of the adjacent spectrum around the 10 x 10 frequencies is that there is an adequate buffer to mitigate any interoperable issues, and that if there are issues, it would be better to address them now in our early deployment."

"Cost is on our minds constantly at NTIA," said Strickling at the APCO conference. "The public-safety broadband network should be self sustaining with enough revenue to cover its operating expenses. We should be doing whatever we can to protect taxpayer money."