

FirstNet Decision on Public-Safety BTOP Awardees Could Come in January (12/11/12)

By Sandra Wendelken

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) board heard updates on three of the seven jurisdictions that were awarded Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grants to help determine the best way for the agencies to move forward with their deployments. Board member Ed Reynolds said a decision on the deployments should come in January.

In May, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA), the agency charged with overseeing FirstNet, partially suspended the \$380 million in public-safety broadband grants awarded to seven states and jurisdictions in 2010. The agencies, including Adams County, Colo.; Charlotte, N.C.; Los Angeles Regional Interoperability Communications Systems (LA-RICS) authority; the state of Mississippi; Motorola Solutions for California's Bay Area Urban Areas Securities Initiative (UASI); the state of New Jersey; and the state of New Mexico were in varying stages of buildout. Charlotte had planned to launch service last summer but put the plans on hold.

Reynolds said the state of Mississippi has been financially hampered by the suspension. The state has about 134 sites for the system, most of which are owned by the state. The sites could support other tenants, but officials can't rent space on the towers until they have approval from FirstNet. In addition, the state needs funding from the Mississippi legislature that isn't covered by the BTOP grant, but asking for funds while the project is suspended is difficult, Reynolds said.

Adams County, Colo., has four sites that could be operational within a month after getting the go-ahead, Reynolds said. Wellington Webb, FirstNet board member and former mayor of Denver, said the county is also absorbing some costs because of the suspension.

The BTOP examples highlighted the board's need to address local requirements in the national architecture. Mississippi likely will need 100 additional towers because foliage affects its coverage. Adams County needs to address coverage for mountainous, rural and urban corridors. Webb said Adams County officials are more concerned with coverage in rural areas of their jurisdiction than urban or mountains areas. He said moving forward with the BTOP systems would help generate goodwill and get state and local buy-in of the nationwide network.

"We need a nationwide architecture here, but we need to play particular attention to local needs," said Chuck Dowd, FirstNet board member and deputy chief of the New York City Police Department. "These issues need to be addressed because it's got to make the locals comfortable."

"We really appreciate the time and effort you've expended here," FirstNet Chairman Sam Ginn said. "You've given us what we need to resolve the BTOP issue."

Craig Farrill, FirstNet board member and acting general manager, said the seven early rollouts will help the board with early system tests. The Public Safety Communications Research (PSCR) team in Boulder, Colo., is working with the board on a public-safety broadband demonstration network. "Our R&D (research and development) center isn't far from Adams County, so we can do that testing, and we look forward to working with them on tests and evaluation."

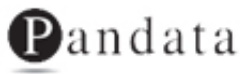
In addition to the BTOP suspension, FirstNet's second board meeting Dec. 11 focused on several housekeeping areas including staffing the newly formed entity, the state and local implementation grant program, and an update on the comments submitted about the proposed network architecture concept, along with more details on the applications and device development for public-safety broadband services.

The [National Public Safety Telecommunications Council \(NPSTC\)](#) presented the launch statement of requirements (SoR) to the FirstNet board to assist the board as it begins to develop the nationwide public-safety broadband network. NPSTC's Broadband Working Group prepared the document to describe the high-level public safety requirements required for network launch. Public-safety practitioners from all disciplines, experts in public-safety communications, commercial wireless providers, members of academia,

information technologists and equipment manufacturer representatives helped develop the document, NPSTC said.

Dowd is overseeing the search for a full-time general manager for the board. He said three to five candidates from the original 27 applications will be identified and be put through a vetting process by the end of the year. Farrill said he is looking for staff with financial backgrounds to help with the business plan for the network. Last month, the board [announced the leadership of FirstNet's Public Safety Advisory Committee \(PSAC\)](#).

Peters Suh, who is working with the board on applications development and operations, provided a presentation on the goals and next steps for apps and devices. The slides are available [here](#).



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