

First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) Background

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) is an independent authority within the Department of Commerce and the US National Telecommunications and Information Agency (NTIA), which was obligated by Congress to take all actions necessary to ensure the building, deployment and operation of a nationwide public safety wireless broadband data network. FirstNet will hold the spectrum license for the National Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN).

Signed into law on February 22, 2012, the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act created FirstNet. The law gives FirstNet the mission to build, operate and maintain the first high-speed, nationwide wireless broadband network dedicated to public safety. FirstNet is intended to provide a single interoperable platform for emergency and daily public safety communications.

FirstNet is governed by a 15-member board consisting of the Attorney General of the United States, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and 12 members appointed by the Secretary of Commerce. The FirstNet Board is composed of representatives from public safety; local, state and federal government; and the wireless industry.

At the state level, planning for FirstNet is conducted by the Statewide Emergency Communications Board and the Department of Public Safety's Emergency Communications Network (ECN) division. The state is currently in the consultation process with FirstNet; the project is called the Minnesota FirstNet Consultation Process (MnFCP). The main goals of MnFCP are:

1. Collect the requirements of the first responder agencies; specifically, where the service is needed and what it needs to support.
2. Prepare the state and its stakeholders for consultation with FirstNet.
3. Develop a sustainable financial plan.

FirstNet issued an RFP for the NPSBN in January 2016. At present, FirstNet is evaluating the proposals it received and has not yet awarded a vendor contract. Once it awards the contract, it will develop plans for coverage and building the network in each state. Upon receiving their state plans, governors will have 90 days to either "opt-in" to FirstNet, meaning the state wants FirstNet to go forward with the plan submitted to the state, or "opt-out," whereby the state will build its own network which will connect to the NPSBN. If a state opts-out, it must build a network. Per the Middle-Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act, states cannot decide that it doesn't want to do either option. Each state will have some sort of network connected to the NPSBN, but the question is who will build and maintain the network.

The SECB is developing a plan for the evaluation of FirstNet's plan for the state of Minnesota. The evaluation will be presented to the Commissioner of Public Safety and the Governor for his decision-making process.

FirstNet has not supplied any pricing information at this time, so it is not known what costs will be associated with a local entity choosing to use the FirstNet network.