

## State, Territory Plans and Next Step in FirstNet Build-Out Arrive Ahead of Schedule

Theo Douglas | June 19, 2017



The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet), which earlier this year [partnered with](#) telecom company AT&T to build out its nationwide network for public safety officials over the next five years, announced the early rollout of individual plans to rapidly deploy that system to 56 U.S. states and territories.

These plans, which can be personalized to states and territories, aren't the last word from FirstNet or AT&T, which will deepen its collaboration and continually update and improve the network during the 25-year contract.

But the Monday, June 19 [announcement](#) comes three months ahead of schedule for FirstNet — which had six months to deliver state plans from the time it partnered with AT&T in late March — and is a milestone likely to evoke a response from states that have not yet decided to join.

Governors should begin receiving their plans shortly and can join the network after reading them, FirstNet Senior Adviser Bill Schrier told *Government Technology*. Otherwise, they'll have until early August to review and return them with comments.

AT&T is expected to make any revisions and issue a final plan for each state sometime in September. At that point, governors will have 90 days — until sometime in December — to decide whether their state or territory will opt in or out of [FirstNet](#).

"With this step, we're ready to deliver the first nationwide network for public safety, by public safety," FirstNet CEO Mike Poth said in a [statement](#). "This network will drive

innovation, security and interoperability for public safety across the country. It's what EMS [emergency medical services], fire and law enforcement spent years fighting for and need right now."

In good times and bad, Schrier told *Government Technology*, existing cellphone and Internet service options frequently put first responders — police and law enforcement agencies, firefighters and EMS personnel — on par with citizens and businesspeople. Cell sites can typically handle up to 1,000 people at any given time without becoming overloaded — but in times of stress, traffic backs up, slowing or stopping.

"One thing I often talk about is when the Seattle Seahawks won the Super Bowl in 2014, we had a victory parade in downtown Seattle and the cellular networks were [overloaded](#). This will fix that," said Schrier, who also is the former CIO for the Seattle Police Department.

States that join FirstNet will receive AT&T's quickest LTE broadband service where it's available. Areas where it's not available will receive its fastest-available service, either 3G or 4G — though AT&T plans to upgrade its entire nationwide network to LTE over the next five years.

But they'll also receive priority over citizens and businesses — and, sometime before the end of 2017, will have "pre-emption" authority allowing them to "bump" residents and commercial users off the network during emergency situations.

"I don't expect that to happen very often. You'd have to have a very congested network," Schrier said.

Other upgrades planned for next year include an evolved packet core due around March of 2018 that will provide first responders with end-to-end encryption of their messages, and the ability for incident commanders to prioritize their own first-responder users during a disaster.

FirstNet users, who already have a dedicated AT&T help desk, will later receive their own dedicated operations center, as well as Identity Credentialing and Access Management, which will uniquely identify first responders allowing them to use the devices of others during a disaster.

FirstNet, created in 2012 to build, deploy and operate a nationwide broadband network for public safety agencies, is an independent authority within the U.S. Department of Commerce. Its investment, funded by Congress, is \$6.5 billion; AT&T is expected to spend about \$40 billion over the life of the contract.

The network rollout has not been entirely drama-free. Also in March, the agency announced resolution of litigation brought by Rivada Mercury, a partnership of companies created specifically for the FirstNet project, alleging it was unfairly dismissed from the procurement process.

At least five states — Alabama, Arizona, [Colorado](#), Michigan and New Hampshire — have issued requests for proposals (RFPs) to explore [opting out of FirstNet](#). New Hampshire selected Rivada Networks as its vendor in 2016.

Brian Shepherd, point of contact at Colorado, which issued its RFP on March 24, called for “creativity and innovation” from potential bidders.

“We believe the full benefit of this network lies not only in providing a solution for first responders, but in enabling a comprehensive statewide critical communications infrastructure that can support multiple services,” Shepherd said at the time.

FirstNet proponents understandably see things differently. Former Pennsylvania Governor and Homeland Security Secretary Tom Ridge called joining the network “one of the most economical and technologically advanced decisions a leader can make.”

“The network will help transform how the nation's fire, law enforcement and EMS personnel communicate. First responders will be able to coordinate and respond more quickly and effectively during emergencies and everyday situations,” Ridge said in the June 19 statement.

Schrier told *Government Technology* that issuing their own RFPs could actually help states gain a better understanding of the process, and the cost involved in opting out and creating their own high-speed broadband plans for first responders.

“An RFP can actually be a good thing for some states because it allows them to explore other options,” he said. “The options are fairly onerous. AT&T will do this at no charge.”

<http://www.govtech.com/State-Territory-Plans-Next-Step-in-FirstNet-Build-Out-Arrive-Ahead-of-Schedule.html>