

PRIMER ON THE FIRSTNET AUTHORITY'S CONGRESSIONAL MANDATE TO DEPLOY A NATIONWIDE PUBLIC SAFETY BROADBAND NETWORK

- *Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions*
(https://firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/TopTenFAQs_190906.pdf)
- *FirstNet: The Future of Public Safety Communications*
(https://firstnet.gov/sites/default/files/Branding_the_Future_of_Public_Safety_Communications_0.pdf)
- The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) was charged by the U.S. Congress to ensure the development, building, and maintenance of a nationwide mobile broadband network dedicated to meeting the needs of the public safety community. Over the past several years, the FirstNet Authority has made great strides toward fulfilling this purpose, including the establishment of a public-private partnership with AT&T, Inc. (AT&T) to deploy the nationwide public safety broadband network across the country and adoption of FirstNet service by hundreds of thousands of public safety professionals. As FirstNet matures and public safety reaps the benefits of a network dedicated to providing them with needed capabilities and features, the FirstNet Authority is focusing on the next stages of fulfilling its mission. The FirstNet Authority is committed to a vision where a dedicated and differentiated broadband communications experience transforms public safety operations to save lives and protect communities. This vision encapsulates the entirety of the “FirstNet Experience” from AT&T’s deployment of the FirstNet network to the FirstNet Authority’s value-adding activities and investments, which make FirstNet different from any other public safety communications experience. Over time, the FirstNet Authority’s work will help enable public safety to communicate in new and ever more useful ways to help transform public safety operations. (*First Responder Network Authority Roadmap*, at 3, https://firstnet.gov/system/tdf/FirstNet_Roadmap.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=1055&force=0).
- *As with many bold public policy initiatives, the creation of FirstNet ensued from disaster and tragedy. Although the idea that all first responders across the United States should share one nationwide network existed prior to September 11, 2001, the events of that terrible day inspired collaborative action from public safety and Congress. As Congress directed, FirstNet is working toward the deployment of a single, interoperable platform for public safety communications that will bring dedicated priority wireless broadband services to millions of public safety personnel at the local, state, tribal, and Federal levels. . . . Authorized by Congress in 2012, FirstNet will fulfill a fundamental need of the public safety community and is the last remaining recommendation to be addressed of the 9/11 Commission. FirstNet’s mission is to ensure the deployment, and operation of a nationwide public safety broadband network (network) for public safety entities. Leveraging Long Term Evolution (LTE)5 technology standards, up to \$7 billion in funding from spectrum auctions, and a nationwide license of 20 MHz of radio frequency spectrum, the FirstNet network is intended to dramatically increase the safety and capabilities of all of those who serve in a public safety capacity, and thereby further protect the American people. Public safety, and thus the American people, will benefit from the availability of a dedicated wireless broadband network prioritized for first responders, the economies of scale afforded by a*



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national, commercial standards-based network, and the force of innovation in applications which to date has only been enjoyed by consumers. (2014 Annual Report to Congress, at 1, [https://firstnet.gov/system/tdf/FirstNet Annual Report to Congress-FY 2014.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=644&force=0](https://firstnet.gov/system/tdf/FirstNet%20Annual%20Report%20to%20Congress-FY%202014.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=644&force=0))

- During the events of September 11, 2001 (9/11), first responders could not communicate with each other. Some radios did not work in the high-rise World Trade Center; radio channels were overloaded by the large number of responders trying to communicate; and public safety radio systems operated on various frequencies and were not interoperable. There were also non-technical issues. Officials struggled to coordinate the multi-agency response, and to maintain command and control of the numerous agencies and responders.

The 9/11 Commission called for the “expedited and increased assignment of radio spectrum for public safety purposes.” Increased spectrum would allow public safety agencies to accommodate an increasing number of users; support interoperability solutions (e.g., shared channels); and leverage new technologies (e.g., live video streams) to enhance response.

In 2012, Congress acted on the recommendation of the 9/11 Commission. In Title VI of the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (P.L. 112-96), Congress authorized the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to allocate additional spectrum for public safety use; established the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) and authorized it to enter into a public-private partnership to build a nationwide public safety broadband network; and, provided \$7 billion out of revenues from spectrum auctions to build the network....

FirstNet has made progress in implementing the provisions in the act. In March 2017, FirstNet awarded a 25-year, \$6.5 billion contract to AT&T to build and maintain the nationwide network for public safety. FirstNet provided AT&T with 20 megahertz (MHz) of broadband spectrum, which AT&T can monetize for public safety and non-public safety use. AT&T is providing FirstNet access to its infrastructure, valued at \$180 billion, and \$40 billion to maintain and improve the network.

In September 2017, FirstNet/AT&T presented states with plans detailing how the network would be deployed in each state. Governors could opt to have AT&T deploy the network (i.e., opt in), or have the state assume responsibility for the deployment (i.e., opt out). By January 2018, all 50 states and 6 territories opted in. This was viewed as a victory for FirstNet, AT&T, and public safety stakeholders who had long advocated for a nationwide network for public safety. (Congressional Research Service, *The First Responder Network (FirstNet) and Next-Generation Communications for Public Safety: Issues for Congress*, April 27, 2018, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R45179>)

