UPDATED: NTIA suspends funds for Los Angeles' public-safety LTE network

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The National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) said it has halted payments for Los Angeles' LTE network for public-safety workers after regulators there voted to halt the construction of the network.

The Los Angeles City Council voted to halt the construction of a massive 700 MHz LTE network that was intended to cover 4,000 square miles and 34,000 law enforcement, fire service and health service workers. The action could cast a cloud over FirstNet, which is charged with building a nationwide LTE network for police, firefighters and other emergency responders.

However, FirstNet officials have pointed out that FirstNet is largely separate from the LTE project in Los Angeles. Indeed, FirstNet earlier this year acknowledged the growing troubles with LA's LTE buildout, noting that FirstNet would "leverage these lessons learned" in its own push for a nationwide LTE network.

According to *Urgent Communications*, the LA City Council voted 12-0 that "construction of the LTE system at city of Los Angeles fire stations and police stations not commence, or immediately cease, if started." The vote came just days after the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors also voted to halt the construction of the network.

"Given the Los Angeles City and County votes in the last week to halt construction on portions of the LA RICS public safety project, it is now clear that LA-RICS faces substantial challenges in fulfilling the project's goals by the statutory deadline of September 30, 2015," NTIA said in a statement. "NTIA is today suspending further construction and has directed LA-RICS to submit an amended project plan by April 13 that is acceptable to the City Council, the County Board of Supervisors and NTIA, acting in consultation with FirstNet."

According to various media reports, opponents of the network raised a range of concerns about the project. Some were worried that the construction of massive cell towers would reduce residents' property values. Others were concerned of the possible health effects from the

operation of cell towers. Others said that the network was being built without input from the community with outdated specifications, was too expensive, and was largely unnecessary.

Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System (LA-RICS) was overseeing the construction of the network, including a total of roughly 177 planned cell towers. And NTIA's Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) was to pay for around 80 percent of the cost of the network. According to Southern California Public Radio, only 14 of the 177 planned cell towers have been built so far.

The seeming collapse of the LA-RICS buildout follows a long line of setbacks for the project, which got its initial start in 2009 with funding from the NTIA. In 2013, LA-RICS was the first jurisdiction in the United States to approve a FirstNet 700 MHz spectrum-lease pact--with the goal of ensuring that LA-RICS' LTE network would integrate with the nationwide public safety broadband network that FirstNet is charged with creating. In 2014, Motorola Solutions was selected as the lead vendor to build the Band 14, 700 MHz network for LA-RICS.

The situation could cast a shadow over FirstNet, which is working to overcome its own issues. Last month, FirstNet said it would delay the release of a draft RFP due to questions that arose in its finance committee. And just a few weeks earlier, members of the Senate Commerce Committee grilled FirstNet board Chairwoman Sue Swenson over a number of issues, including FirstNet's rural coverage plans and its hiring process.

The impetus behind FirstNet stems from the communication problems--including aging and inoperable systems used by different agencies--that emergency workers encountered during the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. FirstNet's goal is to build a nationwide LTE network that would mainly be used by emergency responders--the network is intended to allow police, firefighters and others to all use the same system and be able to talk to each other, without having to change frequencies or equipment. The LTE network is also intended to support high-speed data applications like streaming video.

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