

First-responder broadband system a rare opportunity for public safety, FirstNet official says

Urgent Communications By Jill Nolin

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NEW ORLEANS—A nationwide public-safety broadband network is an opportunity that isn't likely to repeat itself, [FirstNet](#)'s director of government relations Ed Parkinson said yesterday during a session at the [Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials](#) (APCO) conference.

"For the first time really ever in public safety, we will be able to take advantage of market forces so as to ensure we develop a product to public safety that is efficient and that provides a service that has two aspects that commercial carriers cannot offer: priority and preemption," Parkinson told attendees Sunday.

"Frankly, if we don't get this done right now, it will never happen for public safety. This is the best opportunity public safety has ever had in terms of spectrum and having a network that is dedicated to them."

The \$7 billion that has been allocated by Congress to develop the network may not be enough to build the network, but the funding is still \$7 billion more than public safety had previously, he said.

As for the 20 MHz of prime 700 MHz spectrum licensed to FirstNet, "public safety will never get another opportunity to have spectrum like that, so we have to take advantage of this," Parkinson said.

Parkinson did not shed any further light on when state plans might start materializing, but he did say that the pace of plan development likely will vary from state to state. As an example, he noted that small state like Delaware, with its flat topography, is likely to move through the process more quickly than a large state like Texas.

FirstNet started its state plan consultation meetings last week. The next significant milestone will be early next year, when the draft request for proposal (RFP) is expected to be released, Parkinson said. Beyond that, there is no clear timeline, he said.

“We don’t have a definitive date at this point, but I will say this: It is in FirstNet’s interest to get users on the network as quickly as possible,” Parkinson said. “So we certainly have that as our goal, but we want to make sure we build a network that is absolutely what public safety needs and provides a service that is the best that we can possibly do.”

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