

FirstNet's Kennedy highlights progress made during the past year

Urgent Communications By Jill Nolin

August 13, 2014

When [FirstNet](#)'s Acting General Manager, TJ Kennedy, arrived in New Orleans for the [Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials](#) (APCO) conference this month, he brought with him several key FirstNet staffers and an enthusiasm for the progress—within FirstNet and the industry—made since the last APCO conference a year ago.

That headway was visible on the showroom floor, Kennedy said. Several vendors showcased deployable solutions, including a public-safety deployable [LTE](#) solution from Nokia and [Harris](#) that [was announced at the show](#).

“If you look at deployables this year versus deployables last year, I think it would be hard not to say that innovation is happening and competition is being driven forward because of what’s happening with the First Responder Network Authority, what’s happening with next-gen 911, what’s happening in public-safety technology today,” Kennedy said during a “town hall” meeting held on the final day of the conference.

Some of the FirstNet personnel who participated in discussions at the show included Deputy Chief Technical Officer Jeff Bratcher, Director of State Consultation David Buchanan, Director of Outreach Amanda Hilliard and Director of Government Affairs Ed Parkinson, [who described the first-responder broadband system as a rare opportunity for public safety](#).

Despite the developments over the last year, many of the questions posed to Kennedy at the town hall revolved around a fundamental, and familiar, theme—a sense of timing.

“A question I get a lot is, ‘When is FirstNet coming to Mobile?’” said Eric Linsley, director of public safety communications for Mobile County, Ala. “My standing joke is, ‘Well, six months.’”

It's a perpetual six months—it hasn't started and it hasn't ended yet.

"It's a legitimate question from a police chief, from a sheriff (who) wants to know if it's going to built out east to west, from north to south? Is it going to the big cities (first)? But when is it actually going to come down to Mobile?"

"I don't know if you can really answer that, but maybe give us some kind of timeline. Five years? Seven years? It would be helpful."

FirstNet officials have said that [a clearer timeline should begin to materialize after a draft request for proposal \(RFP\) is issued early next year](#). Kennedy reiterated this, noting the RFP and state consultation processes would help that timeline take shape.

But Kennedy also added more in his response to Linsley's question.

"If you look at the consultation process, it's going to take some time for folks to work through that. It's not an overnight process," Kennedy said. "I would suspect it's a yearlong to two-year to whatever-long process, depending on states and how they work through that process. I think some states will go faster, and some states will go slower."

Here are a few other highlights from last week's [FirstNet](#) town hall:

- **Pre-FirstNet networks:** When asked about the failed negotiations with Broadband Technology Opportunities Program (BTOP) grant recipients Charlotte and the state of Mississippi, Kennedy said, "Everybody had a different style of network they were building and different costs and different elements that they had to agree to build. So some of those worked out and some of those did not. But we're very excited to see those that are continuing and the good work that's being done."
- **Self-sustainability:** When asked about how the network would be sustained in the future, Kennedy said, "The better job that we do on leveraging the excess capacity, the better the user fees will be ... That is a very new way of creating a plan self-sustainability that is different than the way we have done it in the past. But it really looks forward to how do you have a network

that gets recapitalized, and you can upgrade on open standards that change and are going to grow. All of us have watched the transition from 2G to 3G to 4G and [TE](#)

—and that’s going to continue to happen—so this new approach is a very good approach for FirstNet and the public-safety community.”

- **Staffing**: Regional outreach positions will be posted in the next 30 to 45 days. FirstNet is also filling other positions, such as the director of applications at the Boulder, Colo., technical headquarters and roles within government affairs.

[Link to Article](#)

[Link to Urgent Communications News Articles](#)