

**FirstNet system will support non-mission-critical voice from Day 1, officials say**

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

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LAS VEGAS— [FirstNet](#) officials yesterday offered insights about progress toward building the much-anticipated nationwide public-safety broadband network, including a commitment that the system will support voice calls from the outset.

During an [IWCE](#) afternoon session, FirstNet Vice Chairman Jeff Johnson and FirstNet Acting Executive Director TJ Kennedy were asked to clarify FirstNet's plans regarding voice over [LTE](#)

. Because no standard exists for mission-critical voice over LTE, there has been some confusion whether FirstNet would offer any kind of voice on its network, according to one question from the audience.

“Let me provide a little finer clarity on that through a question,” Johnson said, turning to Kennedy. “TJ, does FirstNet plan—upon rollout—to have non-mission-critical voice as a service offered with FirstNet?”

Kennedy replied, “Yes.”

Johnson noted that he “trusts” public-safety personnel to understand when they should use LMR and when they should use a non-mission-critical cellular device.

Kennedy echoed this sentiment.

“In all of my experience with police officers, firefighters and paramedics, if you give them tools that work, they're going to use them,” Kennedy said. “They're going to leverage the tools they need to do their job.”

Indeed, one attendee during the session noted that investigators from his New Jersey jurisdiction no longer carry an LMR radio; instead, they use cellular devices to communicate.

Kennedy encouraged public-safety agencies to conduct their own studies to determine how often field officers are leveraging commercial communications devices.

“Send people out to secretly watch how often people use devices on the job for eight hours, 12 hours or 24 hours,” Kennedy said. “I think you’ll find some shockingly surprising results.”

While on the voice topic, Johnson noted that FirstNet now has area on its web site that is designed to help provide guidance to those making investment decisions about their mission-critical LMR networks.

“We were getting questions like, ‘Should I maintain my LMR network?’ Yes. Should I upgrade it? Yes, although it may depend on where you are in the [life of LMR network] cycle. Land mobile radio, push-to-talk, one-to-many communications, etc., is going to be part of field operations at the street level for many years to come.”

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