

FirstNet should not rely on state and local governments as key network-infrastructure partners, Mirgon says

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

March 24, 2015

LAS VEGAS—State and local governments will have key roles in the usage and adoption of the [FirstNet](#) system, but history indicates that they are not reliable enough to be major infrastructure partners for the nationwide public-safety broadband network, according to Richard Mirgon, a consultant and former president of the [Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials](#) (APCO).

“You can't depend on states and locals for long-term, guaranteed service,” Mirgon said last Friday during an [IWCE](#) session examining potential public-private partnerships.

As evidence, Mirgon noted problems that have arisen in three states—Colorado, Nevada and Mississippi—that established statewide LMR systems based on one business model, only to have their state officials and/or lawmakers call for significant changes during the past few years.

“They built networks for public safety and said, ‘You come, and we'll provide,’” Mirgon said. “All of a sudden, the legislature has said, ‘Why are we paying for this? We want the user to [pay for it].’”

That philosophical change has proven to be problematic in Mississippi, Mirgon said.

“Mississippi specifically had the problem of trying to raise fees to broaden the system, and they couldn't raise the fees,” he said.

In addition, history has shown that states constructing networks has not led to [interoperability](#), Mirgon said.

“We built proprietary systems in the states,” Mirgon said. “Even when we got [P25](#) , we deployed it, and we still can't talk to each other. We've got to be doing it better, and we can't do it on the state and local levels.

“Now, I will concede to the point that there's some excellent infrastructure out there that can be used, and there are probably some states that have got some processes that can be used. And there will come a time to expand this network ... that you will have to use local resources. But, again, it comes with a lot of pitfalls, a lot of regulatory issues, legislative issues and financial issues.”

And the instability of state governments pales in comparison to the politics of local government, where the opinions of a relatively small number of people can have a significant impact on policy. As an example, Mirgon cited Los Angeles, where the Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System (LA-RICS) is seeing its planned public-safety [LTE](#) network [jeopardized by firefighter concerns that cell towers deployed near fire stations would be a health hazard](#)

“Three years just to work with site acquisition and try to figure out how to deploy it, and one of the biggest impediments were the firefighters unions,” Mirgon said. “Their comment was simply a matter of, ‘We think the RF on the building is going to give us cancer.’ Whether you believe it or not, it was an impediment to the process.

“FirstNet cannot take that kind of time to move forward, because part of the success of this network is being able to have users paying fees that bring in revenue to be able to refresh and deploy in those areas where the economic model may not be as positive as it is in places like New York City and LA.”

While [speaking before the Senate Commerce Committee on March 11](#) , FirstNet Chairwoman Sue Swenson noted the fact that the LA-RICS project revealed that leveraging government-owned assets would not be as simple as expected, but she did not provide any details about the matter during the hearing.

[Link to Article](#)

[Link to Urgent Communications News Articles](#)