

Cost, coverage will be key to public-safety adoption of FirstNet, state officials say

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[FirstNet](#) is tasked with building a nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety, but cost and coverage—not just prioritized service—will be critical factors in determining first responders' willingness to subscribe to the much-anticipated FirstNet system, state officials said today.

During the latest of the [IWCE](#)'s Urgent Communications' "State of the States" webinar series sponsored by General Dynamics Mission Systems, speakers representing the states of Minnesota and Connecticut said it is not a given that public-safety entities will subscribe to the FirstNet service when the network is deployed.

"Cost is going to be a big deal—especially in the rural areas—and so is coverage," Jackie Mines, the single point of contact (SPOC) for the state of Minnesota, said during the webinar. "When we're talking with our stakeholders about what they are looking for in a FirstNet network, they talk about coverage. Coverage that we don't have today from commercial providers is really important to more rural areas, ... as well as keeping that cost relatively static with what commercial providers offer."

Connecticut SPOC Michael Varney said the first responders in his state have expressed similar sentiments.

"It has to be a compelling need, and it has to be the same rate or cheaper than what they pay for today [for data service from carriers]," Varney said. "The things that would leverage them to move to FirstNet are, of course, coverage, capacity, security and uptime."

Varney said that the state of Connecticut has built out a high-speed fiber network that connects all police departments, fire departments, 911 centers and school districts.

“We certainly want to try to keep those definitions between what we’ve used as public-safety entities for that network as similar as we can to what it used on the public-safety broadband network,” he said. “We view those as providing the same type of service; it’s just that one is a terrestrial wired environment, and the other is a wireless environment to access those data set and facilities that are on that wired network.”

California SPOC Karen Wong said the definition of a “public-safety entity” and the definition of “rural”—subject of FirstNet public-notice proceedings—are being monitored closely by stakeholders in the state. Other hot topics of conversation are application [interoperability](#), the use of deployables and the ability to interface with [next-generation 911](#) deployments in the state, she said.

“The integration of next-gen 911, for us, is critical,” Wong said.

Brian Hobson, FirstNet’s technical lead for state plans, said that FirstNet has completed the initial state-consultation meeting with 40 states and territories. FirstNet expects to complete initial state-consultation meetings with all 56 states and territories by the end of October, he said.

FirstNet’s current focus with states and territories is to collect data that will be used to determine the coverage and deployment plans for the public-safety broadband network in each jurisdiction, Hobson said.

“This is a prime opportunity to gather this information from each state, so we can incorporate it into our acquisition process and make sure that each state has data that represents the uniqueness of each state,” Hobson said. “The more that states can provide detail in this data and make sure that it really represents their state, it will benefit everyone as we go forward in this acquisition process.”

The process to collect the data has not been an easy one, the state officials acknowledged. Wong said the state of California initially distributed a survey to start the process of determining current data usage, but that effort did not yield many results. Instead, the state created a series of “town hall” meetings throughout the state to provide outreach about the FirstNet effort and to

solicit input from stakeholders.

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