

**FirstNet RFP will seek partnership deal that will last 20-25 years, CEO Poth says**

Urgent Communications By Donny Jackson

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[FirstNet](#) will seek a long-term deal that is designed to last at least two decades in its final request for proposal (RFP) for a private partner to deploy a nationwide public-safety broadband network, FirstNet CEO Mike Poth said yesterday at Citi's Internet, Media and Telecommunications Conference in Las Vegas.

Poth said that the winning bidder in the RFP process will have to make a "significant investment" to deploy the first-responder network on FirstNet's 20 MHz of broadband spectrum in the 700 MHz band. A long-term deal should make the unprecedented venture more attractive from a business perspective, he said.

"We're contemplating a pretty significant long-term contract of 20 to 25 years, which should give ample time for the prevailing vendor to not only monetize but get a significant return on their investment in the outlying years," Poth said.

Last month, FirstNet's board unanimously approved release of the final RFP during the first half of January, and Poth said the release date is still targeted for next week. Bids likely will be due in May, with the winning partner being selected in the fall—a timeline that could be altered, depending on the number of bids received, Poth said. After the contract is finalized, buildout of the network is expected to begin "in earnest" in 2017, he said.

When asked when the network would be complete, Poth said, "I don't want to give out a percentage, but we hope that the lion's share of the buildout will be complete within five to six years of the contract initiation."

Poth expressed his belief that this timeline is realistic, noting that FirstNet has gained a reputation with the federal government for accomplishing its tasks according to its established schedules. One factor that could complicate the proposed timetable would be if states and territories choose to "opt out" of FirstNet and build the radio access network (RAN) portion of the system within their boundaries.

Bidders need to make detailed offers during the RFP process, because FirstNet will not be in a position to negotiate significant changes to a proposal during the contract phase, Poth said.

“We’re expecting that their RFP submission and solution will be the blueprint of what they are committing to and how they are going to do the initiation, the rollout, the timing,” Poth said. “We may, through negotiations, have to modify—we may need acceleration in certain areas and deceleration in other areas—but the proposal that they submit will be the artifact that we will issue a contract from.

“We’re not going to allow or entertain a thumbnail sketch and then get into negotiations for a completely different solution.”

FirstNet will keep all bidding information confidential to protect potential partners’ proprietary information, but members of bidding teams will be able to disclose their efforts, if they want, Poth said.

RFP bids will be evaluated based on the proposed business-management approach, technical approach, planned coverage and deployment timing, solution viability and the bidding’s past performance. Key partners in a bidding team are expected to be identified to FirstNet during the RFP process, but Poth acknowledged that partners could change during the life of the long-term deal.

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