

### T-Mobile Bows Out of FirstNet Bidding to Focus on Spectrum, LTE Network

Wireless Week By Diana Goovaerts

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It seems the start just aren't aligning for the Un-carrier when it comes to bidding for the FirstNet contract.

T-Mobile CTO Neville Ray said Tuesday it is "doubtful" the Un-carrier will be a "significant player" in the current FirstNet request for proposal due to timing issues and competing spectrum and network commitments.

"We've talked a lot about where we are with the low band push and that's the primary focus for us at this point in time, both in terms of rolling out and continuing this rapid roll out of 700 MHz and in addition, back to the first part of your question, this focus on the auction," Ray said. "So timing is not great for us in terms of that opportunity."

According to Ray, T-Mobile plans to keep its head down and put the pedal to the metal to follow through with a number of network improvements and spectrum purchases.

Ray said T-Mobile is planning to upgrade its 2x4 multiple-input and multiple-output (MIMO) technology to 4x4 MIMO this year and will also roll out three-carrier aggregation with 300 mbps speeds in some markets by the middle of the year. Ray also said T-Mobile is also preparing to deploy its AWS-3 spectrum to customers in early 2017.

Ray said T-Mobile is also pushing forward on unlicensed spectrum technologies like LTE-U and LAA with the goal of pushing solutions into the marketplace by the end of this year, but noted progress isn't moving as quickly as the carrier had hoped.

Though spectrum comments were limited due to the quiet period restrictions related to the ongoing FCC incentive auction, CFO Braxton Carter said T-Mobile has raised a total of \$9 billion for spectrum purchases.

Ray said just over half of T-Mobile's current spectrum is on LTE technology and the Un-carrier is looking to repurpose its other underutilized spectrum holdings.

"Our biggest opportunity and what we're working through very hard this year and will continue next is how we refarm and bring the benefits of the other half of our spectrum towards LTE," Ray said.

Already, Ray said the LTE spectrum covers nearly 90 percent of the data that flows over T-Mobile's network. Additionally, 53 percent of all T-Mobile's call volumes are carried over LTE.

According to Ray, LTE will be the mainstay technology of the wireless industry for the next several years until the benefits of 5G are realized in 2020 and beyond. Thus, Ray said, T-Mobile's focus on improving its LTE services will give it an edge in the coming years as carriers who focused prematurely and solely on 5G find themselves caught in a capacity trap. Network loading, Ray said, continues to effectively double year over year.

"You have to look hard at their spectrum positions and say 'how do they make it through the next two to three years?'" Ray said. "5G is not going to solve anything for anybody in terms of capacity on these networks for some time to come, so LTE is the workhorse...We are pushing the LTE technology faster and harder than anybody else. And we will be the first to deliver an all-LTE network product across the U.S. marketplace."

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