

2013-02-21 FirstNet board delivers messages to public safety, vendors

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Posted by Brett Boston on Feb 21 '13



In case there was any confusion, members of the FirstNet board this week reiterated their commitment to meeting public-safety standards and expressed plans to involve the vendor community in the nationwide LTE network effort for first responders.

"Our mission here at FirstNet ... is that we're here to serve public safety," Craig Farrill, FirstNet board member and acting general manager, said during the FirstNet board meeting on Tuesday. "There is no other mission. There is no other purpose that we have. And we want to do that in a way that delivers a public-safety-quality network to them at the lowest cost at the earliest stage."

Farrill said that the FirstNet board is working to develop business, operational and financial plans for the nationwide LTE network — plans that could be unveiled as early as the FirstNet board's next meeting in April. Although Farrill's background has been with commercial-carrier networks, he said the top goals for the network are to ensure that it meets and exceeds public-safety requirements, even under the most difficult circumstances.

"Our goal really is to create this resiliency in the network, so it is resilient to failures, it is resilient to natural disasters, it is resilient to terrorist attacks, and it's secure and protected in its operation, meaning that it will have diversity in its radio dimensions and diversity in its switching dimensions," Farrill said.

"In other words, it has to be a 'you bet your life on it' network — a network that a person who walks into a burning building is depending on; a network that a person who walks into a building with guns drawn, and people drawing guns back at them, can depend on. And, it needs to be something that can be relied on in the worst of disasters."

Another concern regarding FirstNet that was expressed by some public-safety officials is that the proposed nationwide network will not allow the local control that first-response agencies want when emergencies arise. FirstNet Chairman Sam Ginn said that the board's goal is to construct the network on a nationwide basis to gain efficiencies and interoperability, but ensure that local first responders would still have autonomy in their use of the network.

"The reasons that we want a national network are because we think it's the only way you can get interoperability on a nationwide basis — we think it's the only way that you can build in the right level of security and reliability," Ginn said. "Now, after having said that, we think that on a state, local and city level, we want those entities to have control of this network for their own operations."

"So, the concept here is national engineering, construction and operation for interoperability reasons, for security reasons and for reliability reasons, and yet have local public-service entities controlling their own destiny, in terms of the applications that they use and the grade of service that they demand."

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Ginn also delivered a message to the vendor community, much of which expressed concern last week about a lack of communication with FirstNet regarding plans for the nationwide LTE network for first responders.

"I think conceptually what we want to do is to architect this system, and we want to test it to make sure that it meets our standards," Ginn said. "I think, at that point, we will ask the vendor community to come and help us construct this system.

"So, for all the vendors out there who have been trying to meet with us and contact us, I think the time will come. Once we have the system architected, and we know precisely what we want to build, we're going to ask you to help us build it."

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