

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) continued to promote the Authority's strategic roadmap at this week's annual International Wireless Conference and Expo (IWCE). FirstNet officials exchanged information with thousands of representatives from the public safety community, agencies from all levels of government, and the vendor community. FirstNet officials also delivered the keynote presentation at Wednesday's IWCE session, highlighting how current planning and partnership development projects will help equip first responders with state-of-the-art communications tools.

"FirstNet has moved into a critical new phase," FirstNet General Manager Bill D'Agostino told attendees. "We are moving quickly to bring public safety communications into the 21st century and provide our first responders with access to services and applications that many Americans already have. At the same time, we must also be looking for ways to deploy a network that can take full advantage of innovation as technology evolves."

"Planning is critical to ensure we are making the most strategic and cost efficient decisions with how we deploy this network," said D'Agostino. He pointed to the roadmap that the FirstNet Board approved earlier this month as setting a path forward for the both the organization and public safety.

"To arrive at a definitive business plan and complete state-based plans, we have several significant tasks on our roadmap that must be accomplished," continued D'Agostino, explaining that the program roadmap will drive key activities in the areas of staffing, analyses of network design and equipment, and state consultation and planning processes, among others. "We believe we have charted a course to prove out a successful FirstNet for public safety."

On the topic of partnerships, Mr. D'Agostino described how FirstNet was taking a number of steps to increase coordination, information sharing, and outreach with the emergency response community. This includes planning workshops to help states and territories better understand their responders' communications needs, as well as the launch of the FirstNet website. FirstNet has also formed a partnership with the Federal Emergency Communications Preparedness Center (ECPC) to coordinate Federal broadband activities for FirstNet, such as coverage requirements and infrastructure sharing.

Mr. D'Agostino was joined by FirstNet Deputy General Manager TJ Kennedy during the keynote presentation, during which they emphasized the need to ensure the network is interoperable, resilient, and secure. The FirstNet officials said they aim to foster a culture of collaboration among FirstNet, its partners and – ultimately – its customers. "We need your ideas and your expertise," Mr. Kennedy told IWCE attendees. "We are always looking for opportunities to exchange information because we cannot do this effectively without solid partnerships and efficient planning." Mr. Kennedy cited the Public Safety Advisory Committee's (PSAC) recent Human Factor Report as an example of public safety stepping up to help FirstNet better understand complicated issues related to the network.

Further, to demonstrate the “real world” benefits of a public safety broadband network, Mr. Kennedy walked attendees through a number of scenarios showing how the network can improve response operations for the hundreds of thousands of law enforcement, paramedics, and fire fighters across the Nation. “The network will allow us to be more interconnected– responder to responder; discipline to discipline: agency to agency; and even incident scene to hospital,” he said. “And this will greatly improve situational awareness, operational coordination, and decision-making, and that will ultimately saves lives and property.”

Mr. D’Agostino predicted that the scenarios that Mr. Kennedy presented would occur more frequently as broadband services and applications are widely deployed over the network and adopted by emergency responders. “This is just a glimpse of what will be possible with the creation of FirstNet.”