



# Top 10

## Frequently Asked Questions



The First Responder Network Authority, or the FirstNet Authority, is the independent authority established by Congress to deliver a nationwide broadband network dedicated to public safety. The network strengthens public safety users' communications capabilities and enables them to respond more quickly and effectively to accidents, disasters, and emergencies.

The First Responder Network Authority is led by a board of leaders and executives from the public safety community; federal, state, and local governments; and the technology, finance, and wireless sectors. It has a staff of about 200 employees with expertise in public safety, telecommunications, customer service, technology, procurement, and other areas needed to develop the network.

It is headquartered in Reston, Virginia, and has a technology center and lab in Boulder, Colorado.

### 1. What is the status of the network and what are the next steps?

The FirstNet Authority's focus is on ensuring that AT&T delivers on the terms of its 25-year contract to build and operate a network that meets the needs of public safety now and into the future. Already, we have overseen the majority of the initial five-year buildout; celebrated the launch and evolution of FirstNet's dedicated core; helped improve and release specialized tools like Z-axis for FirstNet, FirstNet Push-to-Talk, and HPUE solutions; and seen coverage increase across the nation. We are also responsible for directing investments in the network to ensure that it evolves, grows, and innovates based on public safety's critical communications needs. Both of these functions — oversight and investment — are unique to FirstNet; no other carrier gives public safety the same level of assurances that the network will serve their current and future needs.

Through the FirstNet Authority Roadmap, available at [FirstNet.gov/Roadmap](http://FirstNet.gov/Roadmap), and our other outreach efforts the FirstNet Authority listens to responders so that we understand public safety's operational needs and technology trends for mobile broadband communications. With this understanding, we will increase the value of our partnership with AT&T and focus our programs, activities, and investment dollars where they can make the most impact on public safety communications.



## 2. What led to the creation of the First Responder Network Authority?

The 9/11 terrorist attacks brought to the forefront the many communications challenges that first responders face during emergencies and disasters. These issues were captured in the *9/11 Commission Report*, which identified gaps in emergency communications and recommended a nationwide network for law enforcement, fire, and emergency medical personnel communications.

In the years after September 11, the public safety community worked diligently to urge Congress to pass legislation establishing a single network for all public safety agencies to communicate on nationwide. Their advocacy efforts led to the passage of legislation in 2012 to create the agency to deploy the network in all U.S. states and territories, including rural communities and tribal nations.

## 3. How has public safety been involved in the vision for the FirstNet network?

Public safety officials have worked closely with the FirstNet Authority since its inception in 2012 to ensure the network meets first responders' needs – today and in the future. Hand in hand with public safety, the agency reached millions of first responders and state public safety and technology executives across the country to plan for the network. Today, through FirstNet Authority Roadmap activities and public safety engagement programs, this outreach continues.

In addition, the FirstNet Authority coordinates with public safety through the Public Safety Advisory Committee (PSAC), which provides guidance and subject matter expertise from a first responder perspective. Public safety leaders at national, state and local levels continue to advocate for and support FirstNet. Learn more at [FirstNet.gov/PSAC](http://FirstNet.gov/PSAC).

## 4. How was AT&T selected to build, operate, and maintain the FirstNet network?

The FirstNet Authority and the Department of Interior made the 25-year award based on the determination of the overall best value solution for FirstNet and public safety. The buildup to the award included a fair, competitive procurement process that began in January 2016 with release of the network RFP.

The procurement process followed the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) and encouraged offerors to provide innovative solutions that could meet or exceed the needs of public safety.

The procurement was open to all entities, whether traditional wireless companies or new entrants, provided their proposal could meet the RFP's statement of objectives. AT&T was selected on a best-value award that considered financial sustainability and was based on more than just a technically acceptable solution at the lowest cost. The evaluation of proposals assessed the offerors' ability to submit a cost-effective and innovative model, and to meet or exceed the 16 objectives and evaluation factors outlined in the FirstNet RFP.

## 5. Why is the network being built and operated through a public-private model?

The FirstNet Authority and AT&T are modernizing and improving public safety communications by leveraging private sector resources, infrastructure, and cost-saving synergies to deploy and operate the network. This public-private model also helps keep costs down for American taxpayers. To do this, Congress used the sale of communications airwaves (or spectrum) to fund FirstNet's initial operations and help start network deployment; the \$7 billion FirstNet received in initial funding came from FCC spectrum auction revenue, not taxpayer funds.

If the federal government were to build, maintain and operate this network, the estimated cost would be tens of billions of dollars over 25 years. The Government Accountability Office has estimated it could cost up to \$47 billion over 10 years to construct and operate the network.

With this partnership approach, the FirstNet Authority and AT&T do not need any additional federal funding to build and operate the network – it is fully funded and self-sustaining. In return, America's first responders get services far above and beyond what they have today over a first-class broadband network dedicated to their communications needs.

## 6. What are the key terms of the FirstNet Authority's contract with AT&T?

Congress intended for the network to be built and operated as a public-private partnership that brings together the best of the private sector, including commercial best practices, infrastructure, and resources – with the FirstNet Authority's public safety expertise. This approach will lead to a fully-funded, self-sustaining network that will serve public safety for years to come. This business model is built upon the efficient use of resources, infrastructure, cost-saving synergies, and incentives, including:

- 20 MHz of federally owned spectrum and \$6.5 billion in initial funding to the partnership; in return AT&T is deploying and operating the nation-wide high-speed broadband network for public safety over 25 years.
- AT&T is investing about \$40 billion over the life of the contract to build, operate, deploy, and maintain the network, and together with the FirstNet Authority will help ensure the network evolves with the needs of public safety.
- AT&T is using FirstNet's spectrum when it is not being used by public safety for other, commercial purposes. The company prioritizes first responders over any other commercial users.
- FirstNet Authority oversees the contract to ensure it delivers innovation, technology and customer care to public safety through various mechanisms, including subscriber adoption targets, milestone build-outs, disincentive fees, and other mechanisms outlined in the contract.

## 7. What does FirstNet provide first responders that they didn't have before?

In emergencies and at large events, heavy public use can lead to commercial wireless networks becoming overloaded and inaccessible. In those instances, public safety users are treated the same as any other commercial or enterprise user, and communications can be limited due to congestion and capacity issues.

With the FirstNet network, public safety get a dedicated "fast lane" that provides highly secure communications every day and for every emergency. It delivers specialized features to public safety – such as priority access; preemption; more network capacity; and a resilient, hardened connection. The network delivers more than just a public-safety-dedicated wireless connection – it is also creates devices and apps ecosystems that will connect first responders to innovative, life-saving technologies.

## 8. How does the network benefit first responders and help them do their jobs better?

FirstNet improves communications, response times and outcomes for first responders from coast-to-coast, in rural and urban areas, inland and on boarders – leading to safer, and more secure communities. FirstNet provides first responders with innovation and robust capacity so they can take advantage of advanced technologies, tools, and services during emergencies, such as:

- Applications that allow first responders to reliably share videos, text messages, photos and other information during incidents in near real-time;
- Advanced capabilities, like camera-equipped connected drones and robots, to deliver images of wildfires, floods or other events;
- Improved location services through Z-Axis for FirstNet to help with mapping capabilities during rescue and recovery operations;
- Wearables that could relay biometric data of a patient to the hospital or alert when a fire fighter is in distress;
- The FirstNet deployables fleet, made up of 100+ assets that provide on-demand coverage when needed at no cost to FirstNet subscribers;
- FirstNet Push-to-Talk, the first-ever nationwide mission-critical standards-based push-to-talk solution to launch in the U.S.;
- and FirstNet MegaRange™, AT&T's high-power user equipment (HPUE) solution exclusively available on Band 14, which can significantly improve connectivity, especially at the edge of network coverage.

## 9. What's happening with FirstNet now?

FirstNet is live in all 50 states, five U.S. territories and Washington, D.C. In March 2021, more than 17,000 agencies use more than 2.5 million connections on the network.

The FirstNet Authority's public-private partnership with AT&T provides first responders with access to mission-ready capabilities over the FirstNet network. This includes priority and preemption features that give first responders their own "fast lane" on the public safety network to communicate and share information during emergencies, large events, or other situations when commercial networks could become congested. FirstNet is the only broadband network with dedicated spectrum for public safety (Band 14) and 'always on' priority and preemption for access even during times of network congestion.

### Key FirstNet activities include:

**Expanding the network and building out Band 14:** AT&T actively expands FirstNet's footprint and deploys Band 14 capacity and coverage throughout the nation, providing first responders with the bandwidth, capacity, and public safety features they need to communicate, share information, and use innovative technologies. Congress required that the FirstNet Authority ensure that the network extend coverage in rural areas through buildout milestones. The FirstNet deployable fleet provides additional on-demand coverage.

**Driving public safety innovation:** FirstNet unlocked a new technology marketplace for public safety, enabling first responders to benefit from advancements in innovation. The FirstNet App Catalog is filling up with FirstNet-approved mobile apps that are optimized for public safety use over the network. FirstNet has brought to market mission-ready tools such as Z-Axis, FirstNet Push-to-Talk, and HPUE.

**Securing emergency communications:** FirstNet's first-of-its-kind core infrastructure gives first responders the dedicated, highly secure, non-commercial network they deserve. The FirstNet Core, delivered in March 2018, provides tower-to-core encryption of public safety data over FirstNet and end-to-end cyber security. FirstNet subscribers also have access to a dedicated Security Operations Center, offering 24/7/365 support.

**Creating a differentiated broadband communications experience for public safety:** The FirstNet Authority developed a roadmap to advance and evolve FirstNet beyond the current contractual commitments and to create opportunities for public safety to shape the future of their network. Based on input from the public safety community, the FirstNet Authority Roadmap provides a view of emergency responders' critical communications needs and technology trends for mobile broadband communications. The FirstNet Authority will use the Roadmap to prioritize its programs, activities, and investments to ensure first responders have the communications tools they need to save lives and protect communities.

**Engaging with public safety:** The FirstNet Authority continues to engage with public safety in the states, territories, federal agencies, and tribal nations. Input gathered from public safety on their critical communications needs will continuously be incorporated into the FirstNet Authority's Roadmap to help guide the growth, evolution, and advancement of FirstNet. Responders can reach out to a local representative from the FirstNet Authority at [FirstNet.gov/Advisor](https://www.firstnet.gov/Advisor).

## 10. How can I learn more?

Stay up-to-date on the FirstNet Authority activities and the building and deployment of FirstNet at [FirstNet.gov](https://www.firstnet.gov).

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