

FirstNet OKs key RFP elements

Fierce Wireless Tech By Monica Allevan

October 4, 2015

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) board last week approved key elements of its Request for Proposal(s) (RFP) that it expects to deliver before the end of the year, including a national acquisition approach that incorporates rural telecom providers in the nationwide public safety broadband network (NPSBN).

Naturally, that gesture pleased NTCA—The Rural Broadband Association, which has been eager for the chance to participate in the FirstNet effort. "NTCA's small business members look forward to playing a meaningful role in furthering the success of FirstNet, especially in rural areas where the networks of these small providers will be essential to achieving that success for the benefit of all Americans," said NTCA CEO Shirley Bloomfield in a statement.

The FirstNet board also approved a resolution that authorizes FirstNet management to release its final interpretations of 64 statutory provisions that will have an impact on the final RFP and contribute to FirstNet's operations and network policies. That includes, for example, a final definition for the term "rural," and confirms that any states or territories that assume the responsibility to deploy their own radio access networks (RANs) must reinvest all resulting revenues into the nationwide network.

FirstNet said it will post two public notices containing all 64 final interpretations to the *Federal Register*.

The board also approved a resolution for a nationwide solution for deploying the nation's first broadband network dedicated to public safety, thereby removing the possibility that a bidder could be selected to build out the network for a single state or region. "This approach lets the private sector do what they do best to rapidly deploy a network while FirstNet ensures that the network meets the mission of public safety every step of the way," said FirstNet CEO Mike Poth in a press release. "Further, by approving these critical structural elements of the RFP today, the Board provides more clarity and certainty for potential offerors to plan and prepare for the RFP later this year."

Although FirstNet is adopting a nationwide acquisition approach, Poth stressed during the board meeting that the RFP would include measures that would ensure that there is a "meaningful role" for rural telecom carriers and small businesses, which are expected to be part of a nationwide offerer's team, *IWCE's Urgent Communications* reported.

FirstNet, which had its fair share of conflict early on, continues to face skeptics. While the organization uses terms like "acquisition," industry consultant Andrew Seybold points out that the FirstNet network is not a product. "It is a network based on networks that are operational today across the United States and around the world, and it uses LTE, a technology that has become the new norm for broadband wireless," [he wrote in an *Urgent Communications* blog](#) .

"In all fairness, I do not believe the federal government has ever attempted a partnership like this, but if the Department of Commerce and the NTIA continue to insist on treating this as a federal procurement rather than a call for companies that might be willing to sit down and discuss partnering with FirstNet, this final RFP will be met with failure, pure and simple," Seybold said in the blog.

The Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 requires FirstNet to engage in an open, transparent and competitive RFP process for the deployment of the NPSBN. In April, FirstNet released a Special Notice with draft RFP documents that offered opportunities for the public safety community and private sector to provide feedback, which helped inform the board's decision. FirstNet also has issued a series of Public Notices seeking comment on complex legal issues impacting its operations.

[Link to Article](#)

[Link to Fierce News Articles](#)