

NEWS RELEASE

Vermont Department of Public Safety

November 20, 2017

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Public Safety Broadband Commission Recommends FirstNet Opt-In Decision to Governor

Waterbury, Vt.—The Public Safety Broadband Network Commission will recommend to Governor Phil Scott that Vermont opt-in to the federal FirstNet plan to deliver a wireless broadband network to the state’s public safety community. Today’s recommendation culminates a more than year-long evaluation effort by the Governor-appointed commission to evaluate the best option for the build-out of the Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network in Vermont.

“The commission’s focus has remained on ensuring the best service and coverage for our public safety community,” said commission Chair Terry LaValley. “Creation of this network was one of the final recommendations made by the 9/11 Commission. The establishment of a single, interoperable network for public safety nationwide means Vermont’s first responders will have access to a reliable, highly secure and technologically robust cellular network. The commission believes taking full advantage of the federal solution, rather than partnering to build our own network, will best serve the long-term needs of Vermont public safety.”

In 2012, Congress passed legislation creating FirstNet as an independent authority within the U.S. Department of Commerce’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA). FirstNet was to build the nationwide network and eventually become financially self-sufficient by selecting a commercial partner. Following a 15-month national RFP process to secure a partner, AT&T was announced as the winning bidder. Verizon chose not to compete for the award. As the winning bidder, AT&T receives access to dedicated Band 14 spectrum and may profit from leasing unused or underutilized portions of the spectrum to nonpublic safety subscribers. The 25-year contract requires AT&T to build in rural areas of the country, provide priority and pre-emption rights on the network for public safety subscribers, and attract public safety subscribers at prescribed numbers or face hefty financial penalties.

In recommending Vermont opt-in, the commission focused on service, coverage, and risk to the State. Below are key reasons cited for an opt-in recommendation.

- Immediate service - Due to the all-bands approach by AT&T, first responders will have immediate access to all bandwidth owned and operated by AT&T in Vermont and immediate access to priority calling. In an opt-out scenario, Vermont first responders would have to wait for the Band Class 14 network to be built before having access to FirstNet service.
- Pricing - No first responder is required to use the FirstNet/AT&T network, but must be persuaded to subscribe to the service. The commission anticipates that an opt-in decision will spur competition among cell phone providers and drive down costs for first responders, while enhancing services.
- Commitment to expanded coverage – In addition to its existing cellular network, AT&T will leverage funds allocated to FirstNet to increase the number of cell sites in Vermont within the next five years, many in areas where first responders currently lack good coverage.

- No financial cost to Vermont for the network – The financial cost of building, maintaining and operating the network will be born by FirstNet and AT&T. AT&T would be liable for paying any federal financial penalties for failure to attract public safety subscribers in prescribed numbers.

The commission was formed by Governor's Executive Order in 2013 to guide and prepare for FirstNet in Vermont. Key leadership on the commission represents police, fire and EMS personnel and state agency representatives. FirstNet delivered official notices to all state governors on September 29 that final plans for build-out in each state and territory were now in place. The legislation gives governors 90 days to make an opt-in or opt-out decision. Governors have until December 28 to communicate their decision to FirstNet. No response will automatically trigger an opt-in for the network.

"This recommendation comes after a lot of careful work on the part of the commission," said LaValley. "The commission critically reviewed the draft and final proposals submitted by FirstNet/AT&T and worked with their representatives for specific coverage improvements. The commission also secured the services of an independent consultant, Televate, to conduct a technical review of the plan and considered opt-out proposals submitted through a competitive RFP process. Our ongoing contact with the first responder community helped shape the commission's coverage objectives outlined in Vermont's formal data submissions to FirstNet."

In addition to the opt-in recommendation from Televate, the commission also reviewed the opt-in recommendation from an independent review by the Coeur Business Group, which was contracted by the Agency of Digital Services to analyze the opt-in/opt-out options. Commission members also received a financial risks opinion from the State Treasurer's Office that concluded that opt-in was in the best interest of the State of Vermont and an endorsement for opt-in by the International Association of Fire Chiefs, who represent 12,000 fire and emergency services leaders across the country.

More than 30 state governors have already decided to opt-in and accept the deployment plan offered by FirstNet and AT&T. A state that chooses to opt-out must demonstrate it can build and maintain a system comparable to that offered by FirstNet. Since the intent of the federal program is to create a reliable nationwide interoperable network, an opt-out state must meet stringent requirements in order to receive approval from the Federal Communications Commission, NTIA and FirstNet.

"We would also like to thank Vermont's Congressional delegation--Senator Patrick Leahy, Senator Bernie Sanders, and Congressman Peter Welch--for their support. We appreciate the letter they sent to FirstNet seeking the most comprehensive and reliable coverage possible for Vermont's first responders," said LaValley.

The commission maintains a web site with information on the FirstNet project in Vermont. More information is available at www.PSBC.Vermont.gov.

The members of the commission are: Terry LaValley, Single Point of Contact (SPOC), Chair, Department of Public Safety; Chris Herrick, Deputy Commissioner, Department of Public Safety; Steven Locke, Professional Firefighters of V.T., Chief, Burlington Fire Department; Al Barber, Vermont Fire Chiefs Association, Chief, Hinesburg Fire Department; Ron Kumetz, Vermont State Firefighters Association, Alburgh Volunteer Fire Department; Dan Manz, Vermont Ambulance Association, Vice President; Douglas Johnston, Chief, Springfield Police Department; Thomas Hango, Captain Vermont State Police Emergency Communications Commander; Jim Porter, Department of Public Service, Director of Public

Advocacy; Barb Neal, E 9-1-1 Board, Executive Director; Robert White, Agency of Transportation, Senior Manager; Frank Costantino, Agency of Digital Services, ERP Tech Services Director; and Ken Jones, Agency of Commerce & Community Development, Economic Research Analyst.

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