FirstNet Comes to Western NY

By: Donald P. Cialone Jr, FBNY

With so many people tying up lines in emergencies, responders were never able to use their cell phones to communicate. This all came to a head after communications challenges during the response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. The 9/11 Commission recommended the establishment of a single, interoperable network for public safety.

For years, public safety organizations lobbied Congress to make this recommendation a reality. In 2012 Congress established the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) based on public safety’s express concerns and desires.

To truly design the FirstNet network for public safety by public safety – a distinction that makes it unique in American telecommunications history – FirstNet continuously consults with local, state/territory, tribal and federal public safety agencies across the country.

Over the past several years, FirstNet has collaborated with public safety stakeholders and leadership from each state and territory. Never before has the public safety community had the opportunity to provide input towards the creation of a nationwide broadband network tailored specifically to meet their needs as they save lives and protect communities across the nation.

A governance board of 15 members was created that’s made up of telecommunications experts, federal government appointees and public safety officials in an effort to make sure expertise from every aspect of the network got a say in how it works. When AT&T came forward with a plan, FirstNet was fast-tracked five years ahead of schedule and is now able to focus on deploying all over the United States.

**What is FirstNet?**

FirstNet is a dedicated wireless LTE network assigned to all first responders including fire, EMS, law enforcement, security, urgent care, doctors and nurses, that gives priority over the public. The two main benefits of this network are First Priority and Preemption.

First Priority means first responders connect first so they don’t have to compete with non-emergency users for a connection, they will have a priority over the public, so if there are ten people on the network and there is an event the network will knock off those ten people so that.

Preemption will make sure first responders have the bandwidth they need by detouring others off the network. “Preemption is like an HOV lane, you can travel 70 mph, and no one will disturb you”. Says Haris Jamal, Store Manager of the 8200 Transit Road location.

**What network does FirstNet work on?**

The system currently works on AT&T’s network, however once the system is complete FirstNet will be a single, nationwide, interoperable LTE network dedicated to public safety communications. AT&T has won exclusive rights to run the system for the next 25 years through their government contract and are liable for its operational capabilities.

**How is the coverage on the FirstNet network?**

FirstNet wireless coverage reaches more than 99 percent of Americans, extends to 2.74 million square miles, covering 76.2 percent of the continental United States and the District of Columbia.  FirstNet will provide the same services, support, and capabilities that are provided on the mainland to public safety responders in Hawaii and Alaska. FirstNet service will also be provided on all five of the U.S. island territories.  FirstNet primary users will receive priority and preemption across the entire nationwide LTE network.

**What are some of the benefits of FirstNet?**

Some of the more interesting features FirstNet offers are: Sat/COWS, Drones, Enhanced PTT and an Application Ecosystem. Sat/COWS which is short for Satellite Cellular on Wheels, also called deployables, are mobile satellite trucks that can boost coverage for commercial customers during a disaster or event who aren’t on the FirstNet system already. There is a cost for their use although during a disaster FEMA is likely to pick up the cost. There are two Sat/COWS dedicated to the Greater Buffalo/Rochester area.

FirstNet Drones can be tethered to a device and be used to inspect disaster scenes or improve cellular communication during a disaster.

First Net offers an Enhanced Push To Talk (EPTT) and Voice feature which works on WiFi as well as their regular network. EPTT can be tied in to existing mobile radio systems as well as used to send PDF files, voice recordings, text messages, location services, geo fencing, pictures and videos.

Lastly, the Application Ecosystem is basically an app store for applications that will make life easier for first responders. Some of the apps include: Communication and Fleet Management Tools, Push-to-Talk Communications, Work Force Management Solutions, Device Security Solutions, Private Connection Solutions, VPN Solutions, Cloud Storage Solutions, Content Delivery, and Virtual Data Center Services

**What plan choices are available with FirstNet?**

You have two general plan options: Responder Plans or Unlimited Responder Plans.

Responder Plan options are: 2GB plan for Smartphone for $26.50 per month, 5GB plan for Smartphone for $39.00 per month, 100MB plan for Feature Phones for $10.99 a month, or 2GB plan for Tablet for $21.00 a month or 5GB plan for Tablet for $34.00 a month

Unlimited Responder Plan options are: Unlimited Smartphone plan (talk, text, and data) for $39.99 a month, Unlimited Smartphone plan (talk/text/data/mobile hot spot/tethering) with tethering for $44.99 a month, or Unlimited Tablet plan (mobile hotspot/tethering) with tethering $37.99 a month.

All plans are true unlimited data plans with no throttling of data. Tethering can be done via hot spot, wirelessly, or via Bluetooth. All plans come with roaming to Canada and Mexico.

**How does this work if I already have AT&T wireless service?**

Your existing line can be migrated into a FirstNet mobile connection, you can even keep your same phone number. You just have to go through the verification process

**How does this work if I have service with another wireless provider?**

Your phone number can be ported into FirstNet. Simply visit an AT&T store so they can discuss your options and walk you through the verification process and determine your phones compatibility. AT&T is offering a $200 bill credit for new plan activations.

**Does FirstNet have Family Plans?**

Yes. Each First Responder is allowed one line of service on FirstNet and their families can be ported to AT&T on a separate account and participate in the First Responder Family Appreciation Offer which offers a 25% discount on all family member lines. The Family Plans break down as follows:

AT&T Unlimited Premium Plans: 1 line-$60/month, 2 lines-$112.50/month, 3 lines-$127.50/month, 4 lines-$142.50/month.

AT&T Unlimited & More Plans: 1 line-$52.50/month, 2 lines-$93.75/month, 3 lines-$108.75/month, 4 lines-$120/month

**How do I sign up for FirstNet?**

You can sign up for FirstNet at any local AT&T store. First Responders will fall into two categories: First Responder Volunteer or Employee and Professional First Responder Employee or Department (District).

If you are an individual First Responder, you can obtain service for your own personal cell phone on your own however signing up does require credentials from your agency such as a badge or department ID. A store manager will provide you with an activation email. Once you receive the email, you’ll have a few minutes to complete your information. This step is so FirstNet can validate your involvement in a public safety organization and establishing a passcode.

After you complete validation, you will receive a second email from FirstNet that contains an activation/authentication code. Save this email and present it to the AT&T associate. Upon completion of your FirstNet activation you must complete the verification step located at firstnet.com/verify. Your AT&T associate will assist you in completing this process.

the value of every public safety dollar spent by allowing public safety end users to take advantage of an increasingly competitive marketplace.

**Where do I find out more about FirstNet?**

For further information go to firstnet.com. If your looking for further information on signing yourself or your family up for FirstNet contact Transit Road (Amherst) Store Manager Haris Jamal at [HJ673Y@att.com](mailto:HJ673Y@att.com) or via phone at 716.639.0673. If your looking for further information on features and systems for your fire department or district contact FirstNet’s Principle Consultant for Western New York, Marie Farrell at [marie.farrell@att.com](mailto:marie.farrell@att.com) or via phone at 315.830.4994.