

STATEMENT OF SCOTT AGNEW
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Hearing: “Evaluating FirstNet: Performance, Accountability, and Reauthorization”

Before the Subcommittee on Communications & Technology of the
United States House of Representatives Committee on Energy and Commerce

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Chairman Hudson, Ranking Member Matsui, Chairman Guthrie, Ranking Member Pallone and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to provide an update on the FirstNet network and AT&T’s essential role in its expansive deployment, strong performance, nationwide coverage, cutting-edge innovations, and lifesaving public-safety impact.

My name is Scott Agnew. I am the President of FirstNet & Public Sector Mobility at AT&T. I lead AT&T’s FirstNet organization and am responsible for ensuring that AT&T meets its federal contract obligations regarding FirstNet’s deployment, performance, operations, and public-safety engagement.

We applaud your leadership and commitment to public safety, and for taking the crucial first step of releasing draft bipartisan legislation that supports reauthorization. We look forward to working with you and the Energy and Commerce Committee to ensure FirstNet continues to deliver for our nation’s first responders.

Today, I will discuss how AT&T is ensuring that FirstNet delivers on Congress’s vision to create a resilient, interoperable broadband network for America’s first responders and the status of FirstNet’s nationwide deployment and adoption. I will also highlight that AT&T’s commitment to FirstNet extends beyond the contractual requirements and how AT&T has demonstrated its commitment to public safety with its ability to innovate and respond to the ever-evolving public safety needs.

The Public Safety Imperative of FirstNet

Let me begin by stating that AT&T stands with public safety organizations like the International Association of Fire Chiefs (IAFC), National Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF), and many others, and fully supports the reauthorization of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority).¹ Due to the critical nature of this network to our first responder community,

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<https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/Congressional/IACP%20Urges%20Support%20for%20Preserving%20FirstNet%20in%20Joint%20to%20Congress.pdf>

we support reauthorization in advance of its current February 2027 expiration. First responders bravely operate in high-stakes situations (such as terror attacks and natural disasters) where delays in communications can literally mean the difference between life or death to first responders themselves and the people living in impacted communities. Prior to FirstNet, first responders relied on a patchwork of incompatible radio systems and congested commercial networks. In disasters or mass crowd events, commercial networks often become overloaded, leaving public safety agencies struggling to communicate.

Fortunately, Congress established the FirstNet Authority to build a nationwide high-speed interoperable broadband network dedicated to public safety—one in which first responders have priority, preemption, dedicated spectrum when they need it, and interoperability. FirstNet is not merely “another wireless network” but a mission-critical infrastructure asset for the nation’s public safety community.

I could not be prouder of all we’ve accomplished in just 8 years. As discussed in detail below, the FirstNet network has grown from serving zero to nearly 30,600 public safety agencies and direct-support organizations. FirstNet has been on the frontline of countless emergencies and national disasters and has deployed hundreds of portable mobile assets to support our first responders during those events. While we are proud of our accomplishments to date, we are equally excited about the opportunities ahead, including the 5G network upgrades, the physically separate 5G core, and launch of our new FirstNet Fusion service.

A Successful Public-Private Partnership

January 2026 marks ten years since the FirstNet RFP’s release, and the success of the public–private partnership between the FirstNet Authority and AT&T is clear. AT&T stood alone among the four nationwide carriers at the time in answering Public Safety’s call to build a self-sustaining nationwide interoperable broadband network. AT&T entered the competitive bidding process and was ultimately selected over the other bidders to build and operate FirstNet. Together, the FirstNet Authority and AT&T have delivered precisely what the statute envisioned: a network planned with FirstNet Board oversight; the initial build funded through AWS spectrum auction proceeds; built and operated by AT&T; and maintained on a sustainable footing through AT&T’s Band 14 usage payments. This cycle continues today. Public Safety informs priorities for the next phase of enhancements; the FirstNet Board approves network upgrades; those upgrades are funded from ongoing sustainability payments; and AT&T executes the approved plans. The result is a resilient, evolving, and fiscally self-sustaining interoperable network that demonstrates the enduring strength of this public–private partnership.

FirstNet Deployment, Coverage, and Adoption: Status and Progress

The Initial Build

In March 2023, AT&T completed the initial build of the network both on-time and on-budget. The initial build covered more than 2.91 million square miles across all 50 states, the District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories. Importantly, FirstNet is an all-band solution, meaning public safety has priority and preemption on the FirstNet Authority's licensed Band 14 as well as AT&T commercial 5G and LTE spectrum. This means any commercial investment by AT&T to expand coverage and capacity also benefits first responders on FirstNet.

As part of the initial FirstNet build, AT&T collaborated with small and rural wireless providers to quickly expand the reach of FirstNet and launched 2,000 FirstNet tower sites in rural and tribal areas. In addition, nearly 1,200 new FirstNet towers were deployed in areas state leaders and the public safety community identified as needing additional wireless coverage.

From the beginning, AT&T has demonstrated its commitment to public safety by investing its own capital to ensure efficient and rapid deployment of the network. As noted above, this historic build was initially funded by the enacting statute's allocation of \$6.5 billion from auction proceeds—an auction in which *AT&T spent more than \$18 billion*. Indeed, AT&T has demonstrated unparalleled commitment by investing more than \$14 billion of its own capital since the beginning of the FirstNet partnership, and expects to invest approximately \$40 billion of its own capital to build and operate FirstNet over the life of the 25-year contract.

The Next Phase of the Buildout

Since completion of the initial build, the network continues to expand as Congress envisioned. The FirstNet Authority announced the next phase of FirstNet buildout and network evolution that directs \$6 billion over the next ten years for 5G network upgrades; a dedicated, physically separate 5G standalone core; research and development in public safety technology solutions, and over \$2 billion for additional coverage enhancements. To inform the future coverage buildout, the FirstNet Authority has built a First Responder Impact Model to identify potential areas of interest for future tower investment for public safety. The FirstNet Authority is also hosting joint meetings with AT&T and public safety stakeholders in all 50 states, DC, and the five U.S. territories to solicit feedback from public safety and inform the future buildout of FirstNet coverage.

In 2024, as part of the FirstNet Authority's reinvestment announcement, AT&T committed to deploy an additional 1,000 new Band 14 tower sites over 2 years, which were completed ahead of schedule and at no cost to the FirstNet Authority. Today, the FirstNet coverage footprint spans nearly 3 million square miles across urban, suburban, rural, tribal, and territorial areas. The footprint is 200,000 square miles on average larger than competing commercial networks, an area larger than the state of California that is particularly valuable in serving more remote areas. Since the FirstNet buildout began, this effort increased coverage on tribal lands across the United States by more than 64 percent.

The ‘ROG’ Assets

In addition to our unmatched footprint, AT&T also provides unmatched support to public safety through the AT&T FirstNet Response Operations Group™ also known as the “ROG”. The ROG is a dedicated team of former first responders that deploys dedicated network assets at the request of local, state and federal agencies to ensure connectivity during critical events, whether they are planned events or emergency response events. The ROG assets, which can be requested free of charge by FirstNet subscribed agencies, include:

- A fleet of 190+ deployables that boost FirstNet wireless coverage in the aftermath of an emergency incident or help augment network capacity and coverage during a planned event. This fleet includes SatCOLTs (Satellite Cell on Light Truck), Compact Rapid Deployables (CRDs), mini-CRDs, and other mobile assets, available at no additional cost to subscribing public safety agencies.
- Deployable assets that connect via satellite backhaul and provide FirstNet wireless service; they require minimal setup time and are designed for rapid deployment in disasters or special events.
- And smaller, more portable assets, like the miniCRD unit, for example, that fits in two fortified suitcases that can be easily transported into an emergency area. These assets offer FirstNet LTE coverage up to ½ mile in challenging environments.

The AT&T ROG deployables have been vital in disaster response, special event support, and filling “last-mile” coverage gaps during planned and emergency response events. Below, I will use a few real-world scenarios to illustrate how valuable the deployable fleet is in our response to critical events.

FirstNet in Action

FirstNet adoption continues to grow steadily and currently supports nearly 8 million connections, serving nearly 30,600 public safety agencies and direct-support organizations.

The true measure of FirstNet is not just buildout statistics or its share of eligible users—it is how the network performs during critical events when lives are at stake. Time and again, FirstNet has distinguished itself from commercial offers that are marketed and sold to public safety. FirstNet has proven its value in our nation’s most challenging moments.

Keeping First Responders Connected Through Hurricanes Helene and Milton

In the fall of 2024, two back-to-back storms, Hurricane Helene (Category 4) and Hurricane Milton (Category 3), devastated wide swaths of the Southeast. FirstNet proved it could scale and respond to public safety’s needs through network restoration and by deploying Satellite Cells on Light Trucks (SatCOLTs), Compact Rapid Deployables (CRDs), mini-CRDs, and Response

Communications Vehicles to restore coverage where towers and power were down. Across Florida, Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee, and Virginia, FirstNet supported more than 260 emergency requests from public safety, while FirstNet Strike Teams worked shoulder-to-shoulder with first responders in flooded, storm-ravaged communities. In addition, the state of North Carolina required additional support to restore operations for a Public Safety Answering Point (PSAP) that lost its wireline connection during Hurricane Helene. FirstNet provided reliable connectivity that supported that PSAP's operations for months following Hurricane Helene.

Responding to Catastrophic Flooding in Central Texas

In July 2025, record rainfall caused deadly flooding along the Guadalupe River in South Central Texas. Within hours, the AT&T FirstNet ROG was on the ground, supporting the Emergency Operations Center in Kerrville, the urban search and rescue (USAR) teams, and deploying SatCOLTs, CRDs, LEO Emergency Communication Portables (LECPs) and an amphibious vehicle to reach isolated areas. More than 20 public safety support requests were answered. In total, more than 20+ portable cell tower assets were deployed. And within 48 hours, AT&T launched a new macro cell tower site in Hunt, Texas to expand area coverage and capacity to support the influx of volunteers, relief organizations, and visitors aiding in the response efforts. Importantly, this site also provides dedicated connectivity for public safety with Band 14 — permanently expanding dedicated coverage for first responders in the region. As rescue teams waded into floodwaters, FirstNet delivered the connectivity they needed to coordinate evacuations, communicate across jurisdictions, and keep both responders and residents safe.

Securing Communications During the Assassination Attempt in Butler, Pennsylvania

During the July 2024 assassination attempt at President Trump's campaign rally in Butler, PA, FirstNet performed exactly as designed. With thousands of attendees overwhelming commercial networks, FirstNet's always-on priority and preemption ensured uninterrupted communications for hundreds of federal, state, and local first responders. Within minutes of the incident, more than 1,200 instances of First Priority® safeguarded critical calls, protecting first responders from network congestion, and over 11,000 voice and data sessions were completed on FirstNet in just one hour at the peak of the response. Despite network congestion and issues with "calls and texts [being] delayed" on commercial networks, the U.S. House Taskforce on The Attempted Assassination of President Trump found that "law enforcement personnel with FirstNet cellular service did not have notable interference with their connectivity."² Public safety leaders praised

² <https://taskforce.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/july13taskforce.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/12-5-2024-Final-Report-Redacted.pdf>

the reliability with which FirstNet enabled reliable communication across agencies—demonstrating why no other network can match its resilience.³

These are just a few of the many instances where FirstNet has delivered for America's first responders. During these and other mutual aid events, FirstNet is the trusted platform that ensures reliable and interoperable communications under conditions where commercial networks have struggled.

National Events and Special Security

FirstNet has been used to support communications at large-scale national events—such as presidential inaugurations, Fourth of July celebrations, and major sporting events, like Super Bowls—where network congestion is a threat on commercial networks due to the voice and data traffic generated by large crowds. In those events, FirstNet's multi-level priority access and preemption, and the ability to further augment network capacity with deployable assets, ensured public safety agencies had uninterrupted coverage. And with the United States set to host numerous mass events like its 250th anniversary celebration, the 2026 FIFA World Cup, and the 2028 Summer Olympic games, Congress must not fail to reauthorize FirstNet before its expiration in early 2027 as a critical part of that preparation.

Innovation and Evolution

FirstNet has evolved beyond a legacy LTE network into a 5G-enabled architecture with advanced features. Some of the recent innovations and ongoing initiatives include:

- **Enhanced coverage**

FirstNet offers high-power user equipment (HPUE) solutions, for example, FirstNet MegaRange™ and SHIELD MegaFi routers operate on Band 14 and boost connectivity in challenging environments.

- **In-building Solutions:**

As a result of reinvestment by the FirstNet Authority, public safety agencies can receive FirstNet Cell Booster Pros – free of charge – to address in-building challenges and extend the reach of the FirstNet network within police stations, fire departments, and emergency operations centers.⁴

- **Network visibility tools**

FirstNet Central includes a Network Status Map, offering subscribers real-time insight into network status, wireless coverage, ongoing maintenance, and the locations of on-air deployables.

³ <https://www.cnn.com/2024/09/26/politics/house-hearing-trump-assassination-attempt#:~:text=In%20the%20minutes%20before%20Crooks,keep%20Trump%20safe%2C%20Moskowitz%20said.>

⁴ To date, more than 12,000 FirstNet Cell Booster Pros have been installed at the request of public safety across America.

- **Satellite direct-to-device testing**
AT&T and its partners (such as AST SpaceMobile) are conducting FirstNet trials of space-based connectivity with the goal to extend coverage directly to first responder devices in extremely remote locations.
- **Local control and dynamic priority allocation**
Incident commanders may dynamically assign priority to responder groups during events. This ensures the most critical teams maintain connectivity when needed.
- **FirstNet Fusion**
AT&T will soon launch FirstNet Fusion, which will enhance public safety communications and takes inter-carrier interoperability to a new level. Fusion combines critical communications capabilities like push-to-talk, dispatch and connected devices into one seamless experience, and will facilitate the ability to unite all first responders across jurisdictions, carriers, and technologies, whether that's during everyday emergencies, large-scale disasters or widely attended events that require cross-agency mutual aid coordination.

These innovations reflect the FirstNet public-private partnership's commitment to continuous improvement, future readiness, and responsiveness to first-responder's feedback and evolving needs.

Marketplace, Economic & Community Impact

FirstNet's success has helped create a dynamic public safety communications marketplace. Before FirstNet, the public safety communications ecosystem lacked innovation. First responders were beholden to one or two technology providers who often took their business for granted. Now, any public safety agency can choose to subscribe to FirstNet, Built with AT&T, Verizon's Frontline or T-Mobile's T-Priority services, among others. Public safety agencies choose FirstNet over alternative providers because it provides excellent service that meets their needs at a fiercely competitive price. In 2017, all 56 governors of U.S. states and territories opted into FirstNet. There was no federal mandate to do so, nor is any local, state or federal public safety organization mandated to subscribe to FirstNet or an alternative commercial provider. It is a matter of consumer choice in a competitive marketplace.

FirstNet is not just a technical infrastructure; it is a catalyst for broader economic and workforce gains. FirstNet's build-out has leveraged local labor, construction firms, and regional suppliers, driving regional economic activity in rural and urban communities. A 2024 economic impact study estimated that FirstNet deployment has generated nearly 14,000 jobs per year over seven

years and produced approximately \$5.6 billion in wages and salaries to date.⁵ The same study estimated \$8.0 billion in net economic output across industries tied to FirstNet’s deployment.

These gains are fueled by AT&T’s contracting strategy that supports veterans and a variety of business models in deployment, operations, and maintenance. In addition, the network is focused on serving all public safety by ensuring that traditionally underserved communities, like rural and tribal areas, now benefit from the same baseline of reliable communications. FirstNet has lowered barriers to entry for small, rural and resource-constrained agencies to have access to advanced broadband tools and reliable connectivity.

Oversight and Continuous Improvement

No large-scale infrastructure project is without challenges or opportunities for improvement. AT&T welcomes the rigorous oversight and accountability that the FirstNet program receives. Our performance is regularly evaluated by the FirstNet Authority, which provides ongoing feedback, while the GAO, and the Commerce Department’s dedicated OIG conducts ongoing reviews and publicly releases its recommendations, which we take very seriously. FirstNet stands alone in the industry in subjecting itself to such rigorous and public oversight. In addition, we conduct internal assessments and gather valuable input from public safety stakeholders. By receiving feedback from these diverse sources and being held to formal contract requirements, both the oversight and program governance combine to drive continuous enhancements to the program and ensures FirstNet meets the evolving needs of public safety.

Conclusion

Congress’ vision of a dedicated nationwide interoperable broadband infrastructure for first responders was bold and essential. Today, FirstNet is delivering on that vision. It is a living, evolving interoperable network that saves lives, empowers public safety agencies, and strengthens communities.

AT&T is honored to be the steward of this mission. We will continue to listen to public safety needs, expand coverage, drive innovation, and ensure FirstNet remains a trusted, future-proof platform for first responders well into the decades ahead.

AT&T appreciates the Committee’s bipartisan attention to reauthorizing the FirstNet Authority, and we look forward to working closely with you to ensure swift enactment for this vital program.

⁵ https://www.forsmarsh.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Economic-Impact-of-FirstNet-RAN-Development_Executive-Summary.pdf (“FirstNet RAN development was associated with an increase of \$8.0 billion in net economic output across all industries and \$5.6 billion in total wages and salaries for workers and households across the country” (See Table 1); “Building the FirstNet RAN also created an average of 13,877 jobs per year over the 7-year period, with an estimated range of 103 to 28,460 jobs created per year” (See Table 2)).

Thank you and I look forward to your questions.