



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION
FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHORITY
COMBINED BOARD AND COMMITTEES MEETING TRANSCRIPT
February 15, 2023

Stephen Benjamin:

Good morning, today we are convening for the First Responder Network Authority's Combined Board and Committees meetings. We are holding our meeting in Austin, Texas. We are fortunate to have most of our Board members attending in person with a few participating virtually. Thank you to everyone who is joining us today for our first Board meeting of 2023. And, with it being February, it is worth highlighting that next week we'll be celebrating the eleventh anniversary of the law that created the FirstNet Authority.

As we look ahead to our eleventh birthday, it is shaping up to be another important one for public safety, particularly with respect to the continued growth and evolution of the FirstNet network. We are pleased to see the network adoption continue to advance. AT&T recently announced that more than 24,000 public safety agencies are now on the network using 4.4 million connections. This is another positive indicator of public safety's trust in the network, and the FirstNet Authority will continue to engage with public safety this year on the ways to make the network even stronger for their operations.

Today, we're going to receive a Public Safety Advisory Committee update from Chair Christopher Lombard and get Advocacy Committee, Programs and Future Planning Committee, and Finance and Investment Committee updates as well.

I'd like to ask our Board Secretary to call the roll for the Board and confirm that each Committee has a quorum. Madame Secretary, please call the roll and then read the Conflicts of Interest Statement.

Janell Smith:

Sure. I'll mark you as present, Chair. Richard Carrizzo?

Richard Carrizzo:

Present.

Janell Smith:

Billy Bob Brown, Jr.?

Billy Bob Brown, Jr.:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Robert Brown?

Robert Brown:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Brian Crawford?

Brian Crawford:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Alexandra Fernandez-Navarro?

Alexandra Fernandez-Navarro:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Renee Gordon?

Renee Gordon:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Kristin Graziano?

Kristin Graziano:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Billy Hewes?

Billy Hewes:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Peter Koutoujian?

Peter Koutoujian:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Warren Mickens?

Warren Mickens:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Sylvia Moir?

Sylvia Moir:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Jocelyn Moore?

Jocelyn Moore:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Paul Patrick?

Paul Patrick:
Present.

Janell Smith:
Mr. Chair, we do have a quorum for the Board, as well as for all four Committees. Now, I'll read the Conflicts statement.

Prior to participating in the FirstNet Authority Combined Board and Committees Meeting today, the Board members have reviewed the agenda, as well as the conflict-of-interest guidance provided by the Ethics Law and Program Division of the Department of Commerce Office of General Counsel regarding the conflict-of-interest standards that applies to the Board members. All Board members have responded prior to today's meeting that they do not have a conflict and will not need to recuse themselves from participation in any portion of this meeting. Thank you.

Stephen Benjamin:
Thank you, Madame Secretary. Each member of the Board has before him or her the minutes of our November meeting. Are there any additions or corrections to the minutes at this time? Seeing none, I will take a motion that we accept these minutes.

Robert Brown:
Chairman Benjamin, DOJ Designee Robert Brown motions.

Stephen Benjamin:
Is there a second?

Billy Bobby Brown, Jr.:
Chairman Benjamin, DHS designee Billy Bob Brown. I second the motion.

Stephen Benjamin:
All in favor, say "Aye."

Multiple Speakers:
Aye.

Stephen Benjamin:
All opposed say "Nay." Are there any abstentions? All right, then the November meeting minutes are accepted. Madame Secretary, please make the minutes available to the public following this meeting.

We are going to start with an update from our fantastic Chair of the PSAC, Public Safety Advisory Committee Chris Lombard. I'm sorry? I apologize. Okay, the update first? Okay. All right, we'll have the Public Safety Testimonial first before we hear from our fantastic Chair, Chris Lombard.

Richard Carrizzo:
I'll take over then.

Stephen Benjamin:
All right. Fantastic.

Richard Carrizzo:
It's my great honor to get to introduce our public safety guest today that we got to hear from yesterday also. Eric Baker is the Systems Analyst with the Texas Department of Public Safety, and he's here with us this morning. I'll let him kind of introduce a little bit more. He will be speaking to us this morning on how his agency is using FirstNet to improve their operations and the new efficiencies FirstNet has enabled at the Texas Department of Public Safety. With this, Eric, I will turn it over to you, and then we'll have probably some questions for you after the presentation. So, welcome.

Eric Baker:
Wonderful. Thank y'all for having me today. It's a genuine pleasure to be here to speak with y'all. As he said, my name is Eric Baker. I'm the Systems Analyst at the Texas Department of Public Safety. We're the state law enforcement agency for the great state of Texas. Specifically, I work in our public safety solutions center, which has a similar charter to FirstNet where we look into, technology that's going to enhance and benefit our men and women that keep Texas safe.

It may be surprising to some, but last year well, 2021 and 2022, we started issuing FirstNet devices to all of our troopers. So, I'm glad that we're finally in the game and issuing mobile devices to all of our troopers on the road. But that enhances their ability to safely communicate and coordinate with everyone, so we're very grateful for that opportunity. We're also grateful for

the partnership we have with the Authority. We meet with a team every other week to discuss ongoing projects and kind of initiatives and things we would like to see improvements on. So, I'll spend a few moments to kind of give y'all a high-level overview of some of the topics we've been discussing over the past year.

Network connectivity is always an important issue for us. West Texas has always been a challenge because it is a remote area. And those challenges were met, not met all the way, but, high-end power user equipment, HPUE, those provided a lot of benefit for our troopers. We were provided a couple of units to do some testing with. We had our staff drive all around West Texas to evaluate the benefits of the technology, and we found that it kind of effectively doubled our coverage area for our troopers. So, as a result we've been installing those into our black and whites. We also have some of the more man portable pelican cases that we use for different operations. Y'all may be aware that we have a significant border presence right now, and those devices do help enhance and enable our coverage along the border whenever it comes to healthy connectivity.

As technology progresses, though, we've, sorry, my notes just went down. We do have more needs for enhanced covered, and so the concept with the HPUE also got our creative gears going and we've been working with the Authority, and also the University of Texas here at Austin, to kind of come up with communications in a box. Which would be kind of like a forward deployable asset because as technology's progressed, we're pushing a lot more data. And this is especially prevalent with drone operations. You know, at a typical incident, it's not uncommon for us to have multiple drones up in the air. And if we're pushing HD video, it's very easy for us to take a cell site down just with those couple of things going on.

So, we've been working with a couple different partners to develop some kind of like localized container to maintain all of that at the scene and only push relevant information to, say a command post, that's not on scene, or to headquarter staff that may need to be apprised of the situation.

Location-based services is a great topic of interest for us, and we spoke a lot about that yesterday. We've been working with the Authority on a couple of different initiatives with that. Especially, we've been testing an application called Intrepid Response. We've found a lot of success with that, especially with some of these easy access technologies that they provide. And we've also been able to coordinate with other vendors in the field, such as CRG, which create fantastic products that help enable situational awareness.

Lastly, though, we have been heavily invested into an application called Team Awareness Kit, and we've invested significantly on that, to not only provide that as a service to our troopers, but also to other agencies in the state of Texas. FirstNet kind of really comes into that because we want to be able to provide that as a service not just to DPS, but we want to be able to do that for everyone in the state. And to do that, we've got to know who they are. So, we're working with y'all to leverage the IDP and the roster, essentially, of public safety personnel that y'all have been able to create throughout the years for all of your customers. So that's a very vital service that we're looking forward to integrating even more.

Lastly, push-to-talk services is going to be a big issue in the next few years, we foresee. There are a lot of vendors out there that are working towards this technology, especially regarding the mission criticality of it. But we've really kind of seen over the past couple of years with some critical incidents that sometimes LMR doesn't have the penetration to buildings that we expect it to have. However, LTE and Wi-Fi do maintain that presence, so we need to be able to bridge those connections so that we can effectively communicate when we're on-scene.

But, lastly, thank y'all for the opportunity to come and speak. We're really grateful for the partnership that we have with the Authority. We enjoy collaborating and coordinating with y'all on a regular basis, and we're looking forward to the future.

Richard Carrizzo:
I hope you'll take some questions.

Eric Baker:
Absolutely.

Richard Carrizzo:
Great. Kristin?

Kristin Graziano:
Thank you, Mr. Vice Chairman. Mr. Baker, I want to thank you, first of all, for being here. We appreciate you filling us in on all that you guys have been doing in DPS. I'm curious, you talked earlier about devices and giving devices to all of your troopers in the field. What has the typical law enforcement officer's experience been using FirstNet, and how do they use it?

Eric Baker:
They use it in a variety of ways. The most obvious use case is cell phone calls and text messages. Those are invaluable ways to communicate. But it does enable other technologies, like being able to run queries from their MDT. That's something that we're actually deploying out right now. So, the phone calls, text messages, and communicating's a very critical aspect of it, but the emerging criticality is going to be the data that they're able to receive now out in the field. And data going beyond emails, but the mobile applications that really enhance their function.

Richard Carrizzo:
Anyone else? Mayor Hewes.

Billy Hewes:
Thank you, Mr. Vice Chair. Eric, we really appreciate you and your team being here yesterday. The deep dive you gave us provided some pretty profound insights and kind of pretty exciting to what you're doing with your embracing of technology in all sectors. Can you give us an idea of what you see in the future? What your future needs for FirstNet will be?

Eric Baker:
Absolutely. And I touched on this a little bit, but as technology continues to enhance, the

infrastructure needs to be there to support it. So, a really great use case of this is drones. I don't think, really, any of us anticipated how prolific the uses of drones would be in this day and age. So, when we do respond to an incident, we actively deploy multiple drones to a scene. And that's just so much data that, it's really, it can be a bear to manage. So, ensuring that the infrastructure can not only handle that, but also make sure that the priority and preemption is there as well as we're pumping out video. That's really what can kill us out in the field. Going beyond that though is how do we manage all of that data. So, there's going to be a need for a layer of analytics at the edge in some form or fashion, and I think I can confidently say we don't have the subject matter expertise at my department to really develop a extremely robust solution. So, we will definitely be leveraging the relationship with the Authority to work through that problem.

Billy Hewes:
Thank you.

Richard Carrizzo:
Peter.

Peter Koutoujian:
Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Mr. Baker. Again, as Board Member Hewes had mentioned, really impressive presentation yesterday. You guys are doing some really innovative, great, forward-thinking stuff down here in Texas. So, congratulations and thank you for your work because I know it can be replicated elsewhere as well. I was just kind of curious you were just speaking about the data and the importance of the data. Are you thinking of ways that you might be able to need or use additional data, or even what new data you might look to, to plan for the future?

Eric Baker:
Absolutely. In this day and age, whenever you look at a black and white that's on the road, there are so many different types of sensors embedded into that vehicle. There's multiple cameras, microphones, GPS receivers. And that's all data that we're not really leveraging right now. So, a way to be able to not only extract that but have a layer of analytics on top of that. We briefly mentioned yesterday that there is a need for wearables, right? It's an up-and-coming market that I think we really need to start focusing on because it's great for our troopers to have a cell phone, but frankly, whenever they're using it, their situational awareness goes down because their head is down. So, any which way we can still maintain focus on any kind of threat that's out there but still provide that connectivity and that ability to receive any information as needed is critical. So, any kind of technology or data that can help enhance that, we're all ears and looking for new technology.

Peter Koutoujian:
Thank you.

Eric Baker:
Sir, thank y'all. And thank y'all for the kind words.

Richard Carrizzo:

We appreciate you being here today, Eric, and can't thank you enough. We're looking forward, from this Board, the PSAC, and FirstNet Authority to continue the wonderful relationship that we have with your department. Again, thank you for being here. Wonderful presentation yesterday.

Eric Baker:

Thank y'all very much. It's been an absolute pleasure.

Richard Carrizzo:

Mr. Chairman, I'll turn it back over to you.

Stephen Benjamin:

I'll repeat those thanks. Very insightful and useful as we continue to move forward. Thank you, Rich, and thank you to the Board members for those great questions as well. We have the chance to hear from Assistant Chief Lombard. Congratulations, Chris, on your promotion. Thank you. We're so excited to continue to benefit of your leadership and want to congratulate you on your ascension. Let's hear what you got to say, man.

Christopher Lombard:

Thank you so much, Mr. Chair. Good morning, everybody. It's great to see everybody. I'd like to thank the FirstNet Authority and Board members for having me here today to provide you this update on the PSAC. Next slide, please.

So, I wanted to just talk a little bit about some of the recent PSAC accomplishments. The PSAC, as you know, because many of you came to our meetings last November, we enjoyed gathering in-person again. It's good to see people hand-to-hand, face-to-face. I'd like to thank the Board members who joined the PSAC membership after your meetings concluded. Getting to spend time with the two groups together, I thought, was absolutely invaluable to the PSAC. And I know that Chair Benjamin agreed on that concept of getting our two groups together to just talk about the interaction and public safety and the needs out there.

During the meeting, the conversation was dynamic, and we appreciated the time with FirstNet Authority staff and leadership as well. The updates on all the work being done across the Authority bolstered a great operational workshop engagement, which walked the PSAC through how the Market Engagement team works with public safety across the country on a daily basis.

We also continue to meet virtually, bi-monthly, which in January included some helpful updates on state engagement in 2023 and the federal engagement the Authority does with other public safety partners in the emergency communications space. I did share in November that the Tribal Working Group has also resumed their in-person meetings and continues to hope to do so in 2023. So, as you can see, the PSAC is still working closely with the FirstNet Authority, and I'm really eager to see that continue in 2023. Next slide, please.

So, a little bit of a look ahead here. Here's kind of some of our goals for the coming year. Looking to the near future in that vein, the PSAC is currently in the middle of its bi-annual

membership renewal and reappointment process. Per our charter, all PSAC member terms are two years long, and the FirstNet Authority team is working with the associations' leadership to re-nominate members, or nominate new members, to the PSAC for the 2023-2025 period. I have to say I do really appreciate all the work that goes on behind the scenes on this particular effort. So, we'll have an update for any new members at the next Board meeting and look forward to gathering the full PSAC membership in San Diego this June.

Again, just want to say thank you to the Board. Again, the joint meeting was really cool. Really great to see everybody and to be able to have that dialogue and interface. Hope to be able to do some more of that in the future. If there's no questions, that concludes my update, and I'll turn it back to you, Chair Benjamin.

Stephen Benjamin:

Any questions for Chairman Lombard?

No, I couldn't agree more, Chris. The opportunity to meet, gather, give and break bread, it's important. It gives us that type of rapport that allows us to really get some good, strong feedback, insight on leadership and constructive criticism. So, thank you very much.

The -- so, please also extend our thanks to the entire PSAC Executive Committee as well. We will now get an update from the Advocacy Committee. I'll turn it over to Vice Chair and Chair of the Advocacy Committee, Richard Carrizzo.

Richard Carrizzo:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Today, I'd like to give a little update on the first quarter 2023, which was also during the holidays, so it's more of the fiscal first quarter. So, we had hit during the first quarter the team continued to do many engagements. We hit 306 different public safety engagements. And again, we had the two holidays that transposed during those also which slowed things down a little bit. But, hitting 306 was incredible. 206 of those occurred across 51 states and territories. We were able to reach 8,000 stakeholders through these engagements and collected many feedback items ranging from operational needs to use cases to current challenges that we continue to face.

One other aspect that we took during this first quarter was that the Public Safety Immersive Test Center opened up more to have more tours. So, we were able to have 96 people come through that, including department leadership, local and state public safety officials, international visitors and other well-known federal partners. So, it was wonderful to see that. Next slide.

In November, the team traveled to the Gulf Coast of Florida to attend the IAFC Volunteer and Combination Officers Section Symposium. Even though that we were able to face a tropical storm that the entire team got through as all the power went out for the full day. Water came in through the meeting areas. We were still able to hit many engagements of that facet. Nobody left. It was an amazing event living through the tropical storm while they continued with the symposium. They brought out flashlights, little box lights, and the symposium went on. So, FirstNet was able to be there. All of our phones worked, others didn't. So, I don't know what to say about that. But we had, also, the opportunity to meet with VCOS Board of Directors and

listen to their future support and shared information and got direct feedback on FirstNet. We also provided an update to those that were in attendance, which was a little over 500 that day. So, it was a great event that was held.

In the last two weeks, the team and the staff participated in a winter legislative session at the Major County Sheriffs of America, the Major Cities Chiefs Association, and the National Sheriffs' Association. Staff also met with leaders from several law enforcement associations to directly address their priorities and specific areas of interest. Most recently, the Super Bowl in Glendale, Arizona was attended by the FirstNet team, along with during that same week, the Waste Management Gulf Open was going on in Scottsdale, where we were at both events providing support. The team's support and preparation for these events for much of last year working directly with local public safety entities and AT&T to ensure reliable communications throughout the week and weekend. And, as we know, it was a wonderful weekend. Leading up to and during both events, the team provided key communications channel to the AT&T for the Superbowl multiple agencies coordinating which was the MACC and Scottsdale Emergency Operations Center.

The public safety engagement across the country is the backbone of FirstNet and keeps us connected to the responders and public safety officials each and every day. I appreciate being able to report on such great work that's happened this first quarter and looking forward to the next quarter as we continue with our engagements and hear from public safety in order to improve this network.

Mr. Chair, that concludes my report for this quarter.

Benjamin Stephen:

Thank you for the great work of the Advocacy Committee, Rich. Now, we'll get an update from Programs and Future Planning from our Chair, Jocelyn Moore.

Jocelyn Moore:

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning. Next month, March, will mark 6 years since the 25-year contract was awarded to AT&T for the construction, deployment, and operation of the nationwide FirstNet public safety broadband network. I'm pleased to report that the adoption and usage of the FirstNet service by our nation's first responders continues to grow at a tremendous pace, and I'll share a few highlights on the next several slides. Next slide, please.

So, this slide includes updates from AT&T's most recent earnings press release, which happened last month. Highlights from the 4th quarter of 2022 that I would like to call to the Board's attention are as follows. There are now more than 560 FirstNet Ready devices available to be used by public safety on the FirstNet network. AT&T ensures that user devices include support for the nationwide Band 14 spectrum, which you will recall FirstNet strongly -- excuse me -- Public Safety strongly advocated for inclusion as part of the legislation that created FirstNet in 2012 and for which the Authority maintains the FCC License.

Over 1,200 unique solutions were deployed in 2022 for FirstNet public safety users in support of events ranging from large scale disasters -- such as floods, hurricanes, severe weather events

and emergencies, large scale pre-planned events such as concerts and as Chief Carrizzo mentioned, the Superbowl.

We are anticipating the completion of our FirstNet Band 14 spectrum deployment in the upcoming months at which point AT&T will have met 100 percent contract coverage milestone, as well as the state-by-state commitments per the FirstNet 6-year phase of our 25-year contract. So, I want to underline that, 100 percent contract coverage. Also, our reminder that the numbers on this slide and the next two slides are published by AT&T and subject to validation by the FirstNet Authority. Next slide, please.

Mr. Chairman, as you mentioned at the outset, FirstNet device connections have continued to grow. We are now at 4.4 million, more than 4.4 million connections. And since November, our connections have increased by approximately 400,000. So, you'll see that this graphic illustrates the strong and tremendous growth that continues to happen. Next slide, please.

There are also now more than 24,000 public safety agencies and organizations across the nation using FirstNet for their mission critical communications. In closing, Mr. Chairman and members of the Board, this Board should be very happy with the success to date of the FirstNet network. And I know that the Programs and Future Planning Committee is very excited about the work ahead. Not only to update the network and continue to evolve it, but also the additional coverage enhancements for the network as well. Thank you again, and I will now turn the meeting back to you, Mr. Chairman.

Stephen Benjamin:

Thank you so much, Jocelyn. What a fantastic and compelling report. I'm always excited, no matter how many times we see this chart, at the amazing growth of the network and this fantastic partnership. I'm going to turn the microphone over to Brian Crawford, our incredible Chair of Finance and Investment.

Brian Crawford:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Jocelyn, indeed, is always a hard act to follow with talking about finances.

Stephen Benjamin:

We're going to reorder the agenda in the future.

Brian Crawford:

We would certainly appreciate that. But I will say that the has met on several occasions since our last Board meeting. I certainly appreciate the time and consideration put forth by the Committee members as we have reviewed fiscal year financial operations and investment opportunities. I also want to thank our CFO for FirstNet, Kim Farington, and her outstanding team for providing timely reporting on the financial operations and fund balances of the Authority and for answering the Committee's questions as we review the financial operations and investment funding opportunities. Next slide, please.

As you can see, the FirstNet Authority continues to maintain sound financial footing. This slide

illustrates results of operational budget execution for the first four months of fiscal year 2023. Our cumulative actual obligations are right where we want. They're slightly below the budgeted forecast line but well within reasonable operation variances.

So, that concludes the Financial and Investment Committee's business for today. Mr. Chair, I'll turn it back over to you. Thank you.

Stephen Benjamin:
That's very brief, Brian.

Brian Crawford:
From where I come from, financial reports being brief is a good thing.

Stephen Benjamin:
That is a good thing. Thank you so much. And we're way ahead of schedule, so that actually concludes our business for today. Really want to tell you how much of a pleasure it is spending time with you all personally and professionally. And the work that this Board does in concert with our amazing staff here at the Authority. It has been a high point in my professional and personal life. So, thank you, all for your commitment of time, talent, to this wonderful Authority and serving the men and women that we serve across this country to provide the very blanket of security that we all sleep under.

Then, want to give a very brief update on the CEO search as we go forward. We've had a long and strong process. A candidate has been identified and selected. The offer has been accepted, and, currently, the candidate is going through the administrative and security paperwork. We anticipate the individual starting by the end of the first quarter. We're excited about the energy this person will bring to the table and looking forward to a wonderful and orderly transition as we step into this next phase of technological innovation that will hopefully allow us to do a great job even that much better.

I would be remiss if I didn't give my personal thanks and appreciation to Lisa Casias and her incredible team. You and Janell and this entire staff here at the Authority, you've been doing a wonderful job keeping everyone on task and aggressively moving forward in a world that's changing very rapidly. So, I want to say thank you from the entire Board, and I'll pass it over to you to share a few words.

Lisa Casias:
Great, thank you. Also looking forward to the new CEO coming in and, as you said, we're preparing the transition, and we'll welcome when that individual arrives. Looking ahead to 2023 and our other priorities. You know, as we said, the initial five-year buildout of Band 14 spectrum remains on track to be completed in the first part of this year. Really, an amazing accomplishment. This will be, you know, very incremental in allowing us to move forward into our next phase. But even as we reach that milestone, our work, really, is not done. The FirstNet Authority will continue to grow and advance the network using public safety feedback and through our investments.

And as demonstrated in both our PSAC and Advisory Committee updates, we place a high priority on interacting with public safety. Mr. Baker, I want to thank you for being here. This is just one example of how we interact and gain our feedback and use that and how we evolve the network.

As we have discussed this week in Austin, we are entering a new phase of FirstNet. But public safety will continue to be at that center of everything we do. I look forward to working with the Board and public safety to accomplish our goals and ensure FirstNet's continued success and, again, the new CEO that will be arriving soon. Thank you.

Stephen Benjamin:

Fantastic. As my pastor would say, if all hearts and minds are clear, may we have a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Renee Gordon:

Chairman Benjamin, this is Renee Gordon. I make a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Stephen Benjamin:

Is there a second?

Alexandra Fernandez-Navarro:

This is Board member Fernandez-Navarro. I second.

Stephen Benjamin:

All in favor, say "Aye."

Multiple Speakers:

Aye.

Stephen Benjamin:

All opposed. All right, are there any abstentions? All right, seeing none. Thank you, again, to everyone who participated in-person, virtually, making these combined Board and Committee meetings a success the last couple of days. And to the audience who joined us over WebEx today. Our meeting is now adjourned. Godspeed.

Sylvia Moir:

Thank you.

Stephen Benjamin:

Take care, Sylvia.