How FirstNet Can Support Customs and Border Protection

Supporting Agency Missions

The Nationwide deployment of the First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) network will not only revolutionize state and local public safety communications, but could also transform how Federal agencies support and facilitate their public safety missions. For example, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is charged with "safeguarding America's borders thereby protecting the public from dangerous people and materials while enhancing the Nation's global economic competitiveness by enabling legitimate trade and travel." To fulfill this mission, CBP must leverage various technologies to detect, identify, monitor, and respond to threats along the Nation's borders. FirstNet understands that these technologies must be available in both rural and urban environments, operable during planned and unplanned events, and connected to CBP and its public safety partners. This white paper highlights some areas where FirstNet can provide technical capabilities to increase efficiencies, interoperability, and connectivity within CBP's operational components.

Broadband Connectivity for Rural, Remote Response

The United States Border Patrol (USBP) within CBP is responsible for actively patrolling and securing U.S. borders between ports of entry. Land borders stretch across regions with little to no commercial broadband service, which presents significant challenges for the Border Patrol agents operating there. In this environment, information is an invaluable yet scarce resource. The FirstNet network represents potential for supplemental rural coverage, as well as true priority for Border Patrol agents, providing mission critical, high-speed data services and non-mission critical voice to support today's land mobile radio systems. Once fully deployed, FirstNet can specifically better enable Border Patrol agents to:
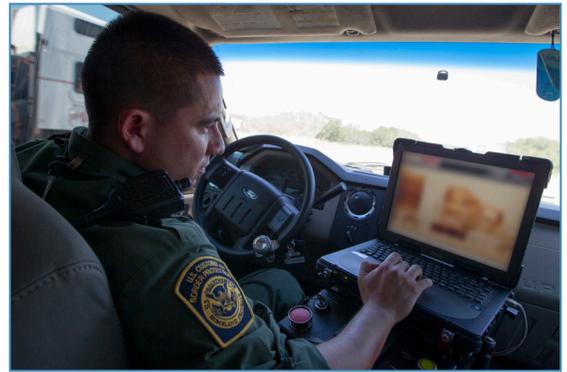

- Connect to critical databases to identify whether detained persons have been previously apprehended for violating immigration law by quickly and efficiently collecting biographic (e.g., name, date of birth, place of birth) and biometric information (e.g., 10-print fingerprints, photo image), which are submitted remotely to said databases;

- Monitor body-worn cameras, track personnel and vehicular locations in rural areas, and monitor notifications based on specific events (e.g., unholstering of a weapon, body armor impact);

- Stream live video from drones, as well as fixed and mobile assets operating along the border to provide situational awareness and advanced surveillance capabilities;

- Use telehealth/telemedicine mobile applications to communicate with physicians and other healthcare specialists using picture and video imagery in the event of an emergency to facilitate treatment and stabilization, and;

- Monitor CBP K-9 units' sensor-equipped collars for remote, real-time monitoring of dogs' vital signs (i.e., temperature, heart rate, respiration) to quickly identify potential health problems.

Interoperable Connectivity

The Office of Field Operations (OFO) within CBP is responsible for managing United States customs operations at 20 Field Operations offices, 328 ports of entries, and more than 70 other locations internationally. As Field Operations officers perform law enforcement and inspection duties in rural and urban areas alike, network access and interoperability are critical. FirstNet will provide priority network access, improved coverage, and interoperability with other Federal, as well as trusted state and local public safety users on the network. FirstNet can provide Field Operations officers the ability to:

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- Preempt local non-public safety traffic to maintain operations during planned and unplanned events;

- Receive priority on a dedicated public safety network while increasing the agency's data capacity in areas with FirstNet coverage;

- Remotely operate and monitor imaging equipment and other remote devices;

- Provide backup links for wired biometric or sensor networks that provide situational awareness;

- Connect and communicate with other agencies and jurisdictions in times of crisis or simply day-to-day operations, and;

- Access photographs, real-time audio/video feeds, and databases from other state, local, or Federal agencies, or within CBP to aid in the identification and apprehension of terrorists, undocumented aliens, and smugglers.

FirstNet's immense potential as a primary or secondary communications network capable of providing field officers and remote devices reliable and prioritized rural data access offers CBP the flexibility to leverage existing voice communications while advancing mission-critical data and supplemental voice capabilities. Once deployed, FirstNet presents an opportunity to reimagine how information sharing practices, technical capabilities, and operational protocols can be transformed to best accomplish CBP's missions and promote organizational integration, innovation, and agility.