

The Virgin Islands Consortium

USVI Becomes First Territory To Join FirstNet Network; Mapp Approves Build-Out Plan To Transform Public Safety Communications

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ST. THOMAS -- Governor Kenneth Mapp announced on Tuesday his decision to accept the [FirstNet](#) and [AT&T](#) plan to deliver a wireless broadband network to the territory's public safety community helping first responders save lives and protect communities. This makes the U.S. Virgin Islands the first U.S. territory to "opt-in" to the FirstNet network, according to Government House.

The announcement comes mere days [following a Consortium article on FirstNet](#), after it was discussed during the Bureau of Information Technology budget hearing on

Thursday. There, B.I.T. Director Angelo Riddick told lawmakers that he'd recommended to the governor that AT&T -- which won the bid to build the network throughout the states and territories -- should build the local FirstNet network. That way, federal funding of over \$500,000 would become available.

"The United States Virgin Islands participated in FirstNet consultation and outreach activities throughout the planning of the network and reviewed the details of the FirstNet State Plan," said the governor on Tuesday. "I have determined that it is in the best interest of the United States Virgin Islands and the Country to participate in the FirstNet deployment of the National Public Safety Broadband Network."

AT&T, in a public-private partnership with FirstNet, will build, operate and maintain a highly secure wireless broadband communications network for the Virgin Islands' public safety community at no cost to the territory for the next 25 years, according to Government House. The FirstNet network will drive innovation and create an entire system of modernized devices, apps and tools just for first responders.

The FirstNet network will transform the way the Virgin Islands' fire, police, EMS and other public safety personnel communicate and share information. Specifically, FirstNet and AT&T will:

- Connect first responder subscribers to the critical information they need in a highly secure manner when handling day-to-day operations, responding to emergencies and supporting large events, like the Annual Carnival Festivals on St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas.
- Create an efficient communications experience for public safety personnel in agencies and jurisdictions across the Territory during natural disasters, including hurricanes and tropical storms.
- Enhance network coverage for first responders, residents and visitors alike across the islands and their coastlines.
- Drive infrastructure investments across the Territory.
- Usher in a new wave of innovation that first responders can depend on. This will create an ever-evolving set of life-saving tools for public safety, including public safety apps, specialized devices and Internet of Things technologies.

V.I.P.D. Commissioner Delroy Richards says the FirstNet technology marks a major improvement in public safety coordination and capability.

"This is consistent with the policy of this Administration to provide not only the training our first responders require, but the tools each agency needs to more efficiently respond to public safety issues by coordinating the use of available resources," Mr. Richards said.

FirstNet and AT&T designed the U.S. Virgin Islands' network solution with direct input from the territory's public safety community. FirstNet has been engaging with Virgin Islands' officials and public safety personnel for years to address their unique communication needs. This includes expanding coverage across the territory, enabling state, local and federal agencies to effectively communicate and coordinate over the islands, even in remote areas and coastlines.

“Governor Mapp’s decision to join FirstNet demonstrates the Virgin Islands’ strong commitment to public safety,” said FirstNet CEO Mike Poth. “The FirstNet network will connect first responders across the Territory’s diverse landscape – including waterways, coastlines and island terrain. FirstNet and AT&T are pleased to have delivered a plan that meets Virgin Islands’ unique needs, and we look forward to equipping first responders with the communications tools they need everyday and in every emergency.”

The decision enables FirstNet and AT&T to begin creating an entirely new wireless ecosystem for public safety communications. Virgin Islands’ first responder subscribers will have immediate access to quality of service and priority to voice and data across the existing nationwide AT&T LTE network.

Preemption for primary users over the AT&T LTE network is expected by year-end. This means fire, police, EMS and other public safety workers will have dedicated access to the network when and where they need it – 24/7/365, like their mission.

“We’re honored to bring FirstNet to the U.S. Virgin Islands and continue our more than 70-year work with the Territory,” said Chris Sambar, senior vice president, AT&T – FirstNet. “This is a major step forward for the Territory’s public safety community. By opting in, Governor Mapp is giving first responders access to the innovative tools and technologies they need to keep themselves as well as the residents and visitors they serve safer.”