

CES 2017: Officials Talk FirstNet, Public Safety Technology

BY: [Theo Douglas](#) | January 5, 2017

LAS VEGAS — As electronics giants revealed their latest partnerships and products at CES 2017, a group of public safety professionals gathered Jan. 4 for an update on FirstNet, the national First Responder Network Authority signed into federal law nearly five years ago — and a panel discussion about what's next for their industry.

FirstNet President T.J. Kennedy told the Consumer Electronics Show audience — a roughly half-full room including public safety professionals and at least one general contractor — that the network has [taken in bids and should award a contract later this year](#).

The session's real question, however, was how broadband can power a public safety transformation. And it's one that Los Angeles Police Department CIO Maggie Goodrich, Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Assistant Sheriff Tom Roberts, and FirstNet Senior Advisor Bill Schrier examined in detail.

Kennedy, the event's moderator, pointed out that Las Vegas public safety personnel recently watched over the city for yet another New Year's Eve celebration, and asked Roberts what kinds of technology and broadband uses his department has.

Virtually every law enforcement officer in the valley works on New Year's Eve, Roberts explained, adding that departments even have the ability to bring in the National Guard.

"We were using applications we never would have thought of before. We had plainclothes officers out there that we didn't want running into each other," Roberts said, noting that his department needs "a network that won't kick you off."

"What does breaking down the barrier and having the same tool in everybody's hands do?" Kennedy asked, referring to networks like FirstNet.

"It eliminates confusion, No. 1," Roberts said. "In public safety, you need to eliminate as much confusion as possible."

Roberts noted that the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department has solved many radio technology issues since 9/11, but it still needs to integrate, for example, multiple command posts.

The LAPD, Goodrich explained, deploys about 1,500 vehicles with video capability. Currently, around 2,000 of its 10,000 officers wear body cameras and another 5,000 officers will ultimately wear them too.

That said, officers must return to department facilities to upload video, she said, adding that livestreaming back to a station is "probably not realistic."

"Certainly there are situations where that would be helpful. It's probably not going to be used for every call out there — we've got 2 million calls for service a year," Goodrich said. "But it would be helpful to have it out there."

Building in technology to supplement what the LAPD is doing with cameras could also allay concerns from district attorneys about videos that come in without intelligence and analytics.

Wouldn't it make sense, Goodrich asked, if her department had more integrated tools and intelligent automation that could take in-car reports over radio noise?

She said that yes, it would — "if we had some sort of mobile report dictation thing that could handle all the noise you're talking about," noting that the LAPD partnered with Ford to develop technology for Interceptor police vehicles. "The more we reduce that report writing time," she said, "the more time an officer spends on the street."

Kennedy, a former trooper himself, noted that if officers could learn that a vehicle is stolen by computer as they begin a traffic stop, they would approach the situation differently with that knowledge. "There are probably 100 business tech ideas right there," he said.

And the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department is working directly with Taser to help create a product, which Roberts says has advantages.

"If you can take whatever we are producing, for the public, they're going to want to consume it as well," Roberts said, noting insurance agencies and the public alike already use available police reports and might buy other technologies.

"As cops, we can't afford to buy one-off solutions," Kennedy noted. "We would much rather drive a solution that can be used in the consumer market."

Circling back around to FirstNet, Schrier, who was CIO of the Seattle Police Department until August and the city of Seattle's chief technology officer prior to that, said the authority will work with a yet-to-be announced private partner to implement its network in 55 states and territories.

"A lot of the apps and technology that you all would, we hope, develop would come through a private partner," he said. "I'm hoping that for FirstNet, my job ... is finding killer apps, finding applications and functions that are not available today, but will make a material difference in the way we keep the public safe."

Kennedy then explained how his late father was fatally stricken with a heart attack while using a treadmill in a rural, remote area, and pointed out that a drone might be used first to relay a defibrillator — just as it could be used to plot a wildfire fire line, to avoid sending in firefighters with radios.

"That's stuff that could be done with sensors. It could be done with throwaway cameras or maybe it could be done with drones. There are so many things that public safety has just not taken advantage of yet," he said, asking panelists to suggest public safety technology the industry should create.

Schrier suggested object recognition for video cameras that would differentiate between animals and people.

"That's the sort of technology advance that we ought to be seeing all throughout CES," he said.

Goodrich agreed, noting that the LAPD would benefit from tech that could help it process the massive quantities of video it generates, and help the department understand when officers are "overdriving" during pursuits.

She also suggested wearable technology like health monitors that could show when an officer is down.

"Can you tell an officer's down if they can't tell us?" she said, noting such devices could also help assess the job's impact on a person.

"These are terrific examples," Kennedy said, noting the heart attack dangers firefighters face as they're on the front lines. Sensors, he said, could alert command staff when heat and humidity become extreme during a firefight — and similar technology could let hospitals know during a mass casualty events how many patients they'll receive.

"If you're on the hospital end, wouldn't you want to know if you're getting 10 patients or 50?" he asked.

"I really encourage you to work with your local public safety folks," Kennedy said to the audience. "I've never seen a firefighter or a police officer say, 'I don't want a tool that works.'"

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