

## **NPSTC BROADBAND TASK FORCE DESERVES KUDOS**

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Yesterday, the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council's broadband task force announced the completion of its final draft of a report designed to outline required — and desired — characteristic to be included in a 700 MHz national broadband network for interoperable public-safety use.

Because the document is a draft and can still be altered, I won't delve into the details here, but the broad-based recommendations are designed to ensure that network users will be able to roam onto the various public-safety networks in the band and be able to operate fundamental applications, including VPN access to their home networks and the ability to interoperate with LMR networks via IP-based gateways.

This work is the culmination of an initiative started earlier this summer, when NPSTC established the task force and gave it 60 days to complete the massive project.

As has been demonstrated repeatedly, getting public safety to reach consensus on such a hot-button topic is difficult in its own right, especially when trying to get the support of vendors and commercial service providers, as well. To accomplish this task in 60 days is a Herculean feat.

"I was skeptical that it would happen," NPSTC Chairman Ralph Haller said during a session at last week's Association of Public-Safety Communications Officials (APCO) conference in Las Vegas.

But it appears the NPSTC broadband task force has done it, delivering a document that notes the operational, technical and governance issues that need to be met to ensure that entities seeking FCC waivers to allow the early deployment of broadband networks at 700 MHz are built in a manner that will support interoperable communications and roaming by first responders from throughout the country.

"Everyone has worked very hard, and it has come together," task force Chairman Dave Buchanan said.

One big key was the endorsement of LTE as the technology platform of choice by APCO, NPSTC and the National Emergency Number Association (NENA), said Emil Olbrich, a representative of the technical working group. Without a commitment to LTE, the task force would have struggled writing recommendations that would have allowed for networks to be built on other platforms, including WiMAX.

"That made our job a lot easier, because we knew what we were dealing with, instead of being technology agnostic," Olbrich said.

Of course, this is only the first step of the process. The task force report will be finalized and delivered to the NPSTC board for a vote in mid-September with the hope that the recommendations will be part of the FCC's record on the subject by October.

After that, only those with a much better crystal ball than mine can predict what the FCC and Congress would do with the information contained in the task-force report.

Had the task-force process been characterized by divisiveness and delay, however, my guess is that the Beltway powers would have found it more expedient to side with competitive commercial interest or to take no action at all—either way, leaving the first-responder community wanting again.

This report is at least an indication that public safety can achieve consensus about broadband and deliver its requirements to federal officials in a timely manner, so first responders have a chance at getting the network capabilities they need and deserve.