# Alabama Conference Reports

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**Alabama Association of Fire Chiefs Alabama Summer Conference Orange Beach, AL (August 13 - 15, 2017)**
Attendance = 200

I attended the 2017 AAFC Summer Conference. Attendance was estimated at 200, with approximately 125 attendees and the rest were with vendors. The information in Alabama is very similar to the other states I have visited. Here are observations/comments.

1. The majority in attendance were generally not very familiar with FirstNet but were supportive of states opting in. I heard no negative comments and everyone is looking forward to this project moving to the next step. There is cautious optimism that the State will opt in but no one was willing to state that they were sure it would happen.
2. There is a general lack of knowledge of FirstNet and entire program. Some had knowledge previously but length of time of entire process has caused many, if not most, to not recall what they had known.
3. Rural coverage, particularly in the northern part of the state will be important.
4. FirstNet Alabama had a booth that was staffed by ATT. They also sponsored an evening event. It was good that they had a presence.
5. **There needs to be a better explanation of FirstNet regarding voice/radio. The few that knew a little bit believed that the interoperability aspect would address LMR. They will need to receive more information regarding what the network will do and the added benefit to their organizations.**
6. Most of those I spoke to are unaware of what their potential costs will be to get on the system.
7. **The most important features are pre-emption and priority**.

**Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police Alabama Sheriffs Association Orange Beach, AL (July 30- August 3, 2017)**

The President of the Alabama Association of Chiefs of Police (AACOP) is Chief **Tommy Reese** of Demopolis PD. The Executive Director is **Adrian Bramblett**.

While not a chief of police, my friend **Tommy Loftis** was there. Tommy worked for the US Attorney in Alabama and approximately 6 months ago left to work for the FBI. He covers the southern half of Alabama as a law enforcement liaison and media resource. Tommy knows most of the chiefs and sheriffs in the southern half of Alabama and introduced me to a significant number of Chiefs.

I was able to meet the Director of the Alabama Highway Patrol, Colonel **Charles Ward**. He has only been in his current position since May 1st. He said he was not intimately aware of the status of FirstNet but that he did have staff looking at it. They would present their recommendation to the Governor's staff and they "would vote on it". He said if it was cheaper to accept the AT&T proposal than the alternative, they would likely vote in favor.

The head of the Alabama Sheriffs Association (ASA) is **Bobby "Boss Hogg" Timmons**. He's an 85-year-old, long time member who's served in numerous capacities within the state of Alabama including state legislator. He's been the Executive Director of the ASA for 42 years. In speaking with people at the conferences, *everyone* connected to law enforcement in Alabama knows Bobby Timmons. They all echoed the same sentiment; if you Bobby likes you you're golden but if you wrong him, you've got a long road.

I spoke with Washington County Sheriff **Richard Stringer**. He said the Sheriffs Association had been given a presentation "a couple of years ago" on FirstNet, but had not heard much since.

He said it would be a cost based decision because there were very few locations in the state that had any money. Every agency was scrambling for dollars.

I spent the afternoon with Chief **Ted Cook** of Mountain Brook PD. Mountain Brook is the most affluent suburb of Birmingham. Chief Cook is also Vice President of AACOP and has served on the Executive Board in one capacity or another since he became a chief. He said the AACOP has not been asked to take an official position, however, they have been asked to have a representative on the committee. He thought Alabama had decided to build a statewide radio system of their own.

There seems to be some older information but the Governor's office does not appear to be asking for much input, especially from the ASA. If there is some newer information it is not being relayed back to either association board. Again, I heard nothing negative about FirstNet from anyone. However, Alabama clearly has no money and the cheapest solution will be selected. Of the two groups I believe the AACOP would have more leverage, however, **Bobby Timmons** is a wild card. Do not ignore Bobby Timmons even if you're not asking for his input.

## Alabama EMS Association Conference, Orange Beach, Alabama (May 10-12, 2017)

Attended the annual educational conference of the Alabama EMS Association in Orange Beach, Alabama. This was a small conference with fewer than 100 people in attendance. The subject matter of the educational sessions was all clinical in nature – nothing about systems, communications, or other management issues. The attendees were all rank and file EMTs and paramedics. There was no one in attendance in any sort of management or leadership role. The original schedule included a FirstNet presentation, however it was cancelled without explanation.

There was an exhibit area with about 20 vendors. There were no communications or IT vendors at all. It was all ambulance manufacturers, EMS gear, and EMT/paramedic educational programs.

I talked to numerous individual attendees, as well as several Association board members. They were all vaguely aware of FirstNet and what it is about. However, they are not at all informed or engaged about what is happening in their state. The association itself seems mostly educational in nature and they are not engaged in any way in advocacy or lobbying activities. They could not tell me if there is anyone from EMS on the state's FRN advisory board and they don't have any communication with the advisory board.

**Alabama Sheriffs and Police Chiefs Conference, Montgomery, Alabama, (January 22-25, 2017)**

It is interesting to note that both groups meet separately a block apart with no joint activities.
Approximately 100 attendees at Sheriffs
Approximately 300 attendees at Police Chiefs

- The Alabama First Responder Wireless Commission did their first presentation on FirstNet and related issues at the Sheriffs conference and a representative was present at the Chiefs conference
- Sheriffs and Chiefs present either didn't know or only have the very basic understanding of FirstNet
- Leadership of both associations get their FirstNet info from the state or have colleagues that belong to Safecom
- Lack of funds for basic law enforcement services is a major issue affecting those I spoke with.

I had detailed conversations with Southern Linc, Alabama Law Enforcement Agency, and several members of the Associations leadership:

ATT & Southern Linc were sponsors for both and had a presence on the exhibit floors at both conferences. Verizon only sponsored the Chiefs and had a presence on that floor

- Southern Linc claims they provide their PTT to almost 80% of the state public safety officers. They provide PTT to almost 100% of state agencies.
- Southern Linc's business model is predominantly utilities, government, and business. They have very few consumers
- Southern Linc does not currently provide data ! Their users only have PTT and cell voice.
- Southern Linc offers a rugged Motorola phone. They are starting to offer Sonim's XP7.
- A Trooper I spoke with was carrying 3 devices to communicate ! His portable LMR, a Southern Linc phone for PTT, and his own Verizon iPhone to access data and apps.
- Southern Linc is currently building out a LTE network with claims of the best encryption of any carrier. Plans to migrate customers there in 2018
- Southern Linc will provide nationwide PTT via other carriers primarily Verizon by 2018
- Southern Link is proudly talking about a 300ft range hot spot tied to a mobile modem for patrol cars.
- Southern Linc via their parent corporation Southern Company (2nd largest utility in country) is very influential politically within the state via long term relationships and aggressive lobbying efforts.
- Southern Linc wants Alabama to opt out and claims they can do the same or better as FirstNet at less cost to the agencies
- Several law enforcement individuals I spoke with are happy with Southern Linc's PTT, although they said their coverage is not as good as the company claims.

Alabama has garnered interest about their opt out possibility:

- In September 2016 the state issued a RFP for a Broadband Radio Access Network with a due date of October 2016.
- Due to Vendor concerns the state has extended the RFP deadline four times.
- Regarding the latest RFP extension, proposals are now due by January 31
- Alabama is currently developing a team to review the RFP's
- I have been told there are at least 6 vendors interested in the bid. I could not find out who they are
- All state officials I spoke with said no decision has been made regarding opt in or opt out, they just want to provide their governor with options.

## Alabama Fire Chiefs, Tuscaloosa, Alabama (January 31 - February 3, 2017)

I attended the Alabama Fire Chiefs educational session at the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa. During the session I met with the President of the Alabama Fire Chiefs and discussed the advent of the broadband net and the opt-in/opt-out issue for Alabama. While he'd heard of it he wasn't well informed. However, I also met with the Interim Executive Director of the Alabama Fire College, Alberto Zaragoza, and he was well informed and followed the issue closely. I met with Jon Lord, the Fire Chief of Rocky Ridge, a member of the State Wireless Commission whom you'll remember that we reached out to in September (Dick). We had several conversations and he remains a great resource for us. I met with Alan Reid, Program Coordinator for ALFirstComm, who had a booth at the conference. He was doing a great job of reaching out to the attendees and educating them on FirstNet.

My sense is that Alabama will do an RFP but even if they do there is not likely to be any state financing available to do the project so they'll probably opt-in for that reason alone.

During the course of my visits around the country I've received a number of suggestions of how the folks could and would reach out to the governor and the communication network to get their voices heard, but there is a path that has recently come up that hadn't occurred to me (maybe you had already thought of it and I'm just behind the curve, or we didn't want to get into the political weeds) and I think it had some merit so I did act on it. I called Ken LaSala, IAFCs Government Affairs guy, and spoke to him about it and he concurred. The Fire Chiefs will be on the hill visiting with their congressional members soon, CFSI, during that time the IAFC prints a list of talking points important to the organization to have the Chiefs share with their electeds. On the list Ken agreed to put a talking point that says something like this:

> If you know your federal elected member knows and has a good working relationship with your governor please let them know that the IAFC is in support of the FirstNet Project and would support the option of the governor to be the Opt-In for the development and implementation of FirstNet in the state.