



# Report in Brief

June 5, 2024

## Background

The First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet Authority) was established within the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) to ensure a Nationwide Public Safety Broadband Network (NPSBN) was established. FirstNet Authority provided information to each state and territory that specified its plan to build a radio access network (RAN) in each area. States and territories were responsible for determining whether to build their own RANs or allow FirstNet Authority to build them.

In March 2017, FirstNet Authority signed a 25-year contract with AT&T to establish the NPSBN, with a contract ceiling of up to \$100 billion and three task orders (TOs). By January 2018, all states and territories had opted to allow AT&T to build the RANs, and FirstNet Authority issued TO 4 for that purpose.

To comply with contract milestones, AT&T had to achieve 95 percent of its planned coverage for Band 14 (the dedicated spectrum for public safety) in rural and nonrural areas by March 2022 and 100 percent coverage by full operational capability in March 2023.

## Why We Did This Review

We announced two concurrent audits to determine whether FirstNet Authority is ensuring that AT&T is achieving the desired results for (1) device connection targets for each state and territory and (2) network coverage for each state and territory. We separated these objectives into three components that include (1) the evolution of the desired results for device connection targets and network coverage as executed through contract modifications, (2) oversight of device connection targets, and (3) oversight of network coverage. This report focuses on the third component: FirstNet Authority's oversight of network coverage.

## FIRST RESPONDER NETWORK AUTHORITY

### FirstNet Authority's Lack of NPSBN Contract Oversight for Coverage Puts at Risk First Responders' Ability to Serve the Public Effectively

OIG-24-026-A

## WHAT WE FOUND

Overall, we found that FirstNet Authority did not adequately assess AT&T's performance to ensure that it met the desired results for coverage in each state and territory. Specifically, FirstNet Authority did not independently verify AT&T's coverage claims to ensure accuracy before issuing performance-based payments. Consequently, FirstNet Authority cannot report with reasonable assurance that AT&T's coverage reports are reliable and accurate—resulting in uncertainty as to whether or not (1) AT&T met network coverage requirements and (2) the government received the services for which it paid. As a result of the internal control deficiencies regarding the lack of independent verification of coverage claims for performance-based payments, we are questioning those payments as unsupported costs.

## WHAT WE RECOMMENDED

We recommended that the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Communications and Information and NTIA Administrator direct FirstNet Authority's Chief Executive Officer and Chief Procurement Officer to

1. Modify the NPSBN contract quality assurance surveillance plan (QASP) for TO 4 to include all items necessary for adequate contractor performance, the method used to measure each item, and any necessary details to perform adequate contract surveillance.
2. Modify the NPSBN contract QASP for TO 4 to ensure that it includes surveillance activities for all work requiring surveillance and contains measurable performance standards as required by Federal Acquisition Regulation Part 37.
3. Strengthen FirstNet Authority's contract monitoring activities, including developing and implementing procedures to
  - a. independently verify the accuracy of AT&T's coverage reports;
  - b. ensure timely and effective remediation of AT&T issues;
  - c. conduct on-site inspections;
  - d. collect, analyze, and use customer feedback to verify or validate AT&T's performance; and
  - e. use a propagation tool to confirm AT&T's reporting.
4. Develop and implement policies and procedures for monitoring contractor performance to ensure effective surveillance and, at a minimum, include the following: outlining roles and responsibilities, preparing and using the QASP, developing performance standards and methods of surveillance, monitoring contractor performance, and documenting surveillance activities in the contracting officer's representative's file.
5. Determine whether the services represented by the unsupported costs were provided by AT&T and recoup any costs that cannot be validated.