

Customer Stories

Fresno County

Fresno County agencies rely on FirstNet for interoperability

- **Agency/Organization Needs** – Fresno County agencies, including the Fresno County Sheriff's Office, Fresno Police and the County's IT department joined FirstNet to provide first responders with reliable, modern communications tools. Other agencies are in the process of joining.
- **Networking Solution** – FirstNet is helping Fresno County with planned increases in coverage and capacity. This gives first responders the connectivity they need in cities and towns like Fresno, Clovis, Mendota, Orange Cove, and Kingsburg.
- **Agency value** – Innovative tools, such as relevant applications and connected devices, give public safety workers more actionable information for heightened situational awareness
- **Industry Focus** – Public safety
- **Size** – 990+ connections for employees working across multiple departments

With such disparate terrain, the ability for county and city officials to communicate with each other – and with other agencies – is critical.

About Fresno County

Fresno County is bounded on the west by the Pacific Coast Range and on the east by the Sierra Nevada. It has high, rugged mountains, a valley floor and urban areas and it spreads out for over 6,011 square miles. It's also home to about 1 million residents.

The City of Fresno is a community of over 540,000 people that covers over 115 square miles. Nestled in the San Joaquin Valley near the center of the state, Fresno is the 5th largest city in California and the 34th largest in the nation. While it's a large metropolitan city, the area is heavily agricultural and responsible for much of the nation's food supply.

The Situation

With such disparate terrain, the ability for county and city officials to communicate with each other – and with other agencies – is critical. The Fresno County Sheriff's Office has sworn personnel, a mounted posse, an air squadron, and mountaineer and canine volunteers. And the agency needs to be able to communicate with its deputies when they are in remote locations. They need to be able

Keeping personnel safe a top priority for agencies

“Almost every time, communication among agencies has been an issue. When I heard about FirstNet, I thought, ‘Here’s our opportunity to fix that problem.’”

**– Margaret Mims
Fresno County Sheriff**



Sheriff Margaret Mims

to talk to each other and to communicate with other agencies involved.

But the rugged terrain presented challenges for the department, both with reliable communication to keep personnel safe and interoperability.

“That’s been a common theme in my four decades in law enforcement when it comes to the after-action reports of major incidents,” Fresno County Sheriff Margaret Mims said. “Almost every time, communication among agencies has been an issue. When I heard about FirstNet, I thought, ‘Here’s our opportunity to fix that problem.’”

The City of Fresno Police Department – which is made up of over 779 sworn officers and 263 civilian positions – also wanted to make sure that it could communicate and collaborate with partner agencies in the county.

The department has four divisions, including patrol, investigations, patrol support and administration. And it serves the community with five policing districts. Because of the

metropolitan population, the department faces many of the same situations major cities across the United States face.

The Solution

FirstNet Sales teams worked with local network engineering and external affairs to meet with key decision makers with both the Fresno County Sheriff’s Office and the Fresno Police Department to provide input on plans over an 18-month period and talk through coverage needs in key areas.

Sales teams explained the benefits of Band14 in those areas as well as the availability of additional resources – like Satellite Cells on Wheels, Cells on Light Trucks and Cells on wings.

In addition, sales teams talked with officials about the benefits of bringing key departments that support first responders onto FirstNet – so they could help with emergencies. The county agreed FirstNet was the best long-term solution for its personnel. And the City of Fresno soon followed.



“Fresno County has many search and rescue missions in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range. Lost hikers and visitors are a major concern. And there is little to no communication available in these areas.”

**Lt. Kathy Curtice
Fresno Sheriff’s Office**

Why Fresno Sheriff joined

The Fresno County Sheriff’s Office was an early FirstNet adopter, joining in June 2018. And the agency has continued to expand its FirstNet usage – adding over 200 lines in 2020 and 2021.

“Fresno County has many search and rescue missions in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range,” said Lt. Kathy Curtice, Fresno County Sheriff’s Office. “Lost hikers and visitors are a major concern. And there is little to no communication available in these areas.”

When Fresno County initially joined, officials ran a mock search and rescue mission in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

FirstNet, Built with AT&T, deployed a Satellite Cell on Light Truck to the remote command center, which allowed the sheriff’s office to communicate to important resources for computer access and it used Enhanced Push-to-Talk, which is FirstNet Ready, for some of the areas where the tower was able to reach and provide a signal.

“We can’t predict when, where or what emergencies will happen. But whether it be a

wildfire, earthquake or man-made disaster, it’s important that our deputies are equipped with the best technology possible to create the best response possible,” Sheriff Mims said. “Moving to FirstNet puts us in the best position to do that. We chose to move to FirstNet as a proactive measure as it will allow us to deliver vital safety services to the public – today and well into the future.”

By subscribing to FirstNet, Fresno County Sheriff’s deputies can stay connected to the critical information they need. This helps them to easily and quickly communicate with one another during everyday situations, big events or emergencies.

“It’s reassuring to know that in times of crisis, FirstNet will give us modernized, reliable communications capabilities to reach those in need and perform our jobs uninterrupted. This is a valuable tool that we hope all public safety agencies in California will consider implementing because when our communities rely on us most, life-saving resources should never be impacted by the limitations of commercial networks,” Sheriff Mims added.



“In this day and age of denial-of-service attacks, cyber hacking and internet security our biggest issue is keeping our network safe from intrusion. We believe FirstNet is assisting us in keeping our communication and data systems secure from that threat.”

**Capt. Don Gross,
Fresno Police Department**

Fresno Police wanted to ensure they were on a consistent network with other agencies

Capt. Don Gross is a 29-year veteran with the Fresno Police Department, and he oversees the Communications/Data Analysis Bureau. Reviewing the benefits of joining FirstNet has been his project for the last three years.

He’s responsible for the communications center and information technology support for the agency.

While the department didn’t face many data communication issues, it wanted to make sure that in-car mobile terminals were on a secure and consistent data network with neighboring agencies, he said. This included the Fresno County Sheriff’s Office and the Clovis Police Department.

“We have to ensure that our MDS system is always up and functional 24/7/365,” he added. “System down time is not an option.”

The department has 300 to 400 patrol vehicles out in the field at any given time. And it averages about 1,100 9-1-1 calls daily – plus another 1,000 to 2,000 non-emergency calls. So, the agency relies heavily on its MDS equipment to handle its communication needs.

Making the transition

Capt. Gross said the department was aware of FirstNet through the federal program and was very interested in becoming a part of this nationwide planned system.

“Once we confirmed that our partner agencies were moving to FirstNet, we wanted to ensure consistency across our region,” he said. “With FirstNet, we have had consistent system up time, with no issues occurring.”

Ensuring prioritized communication channels for law enforcement is always a concern for the department, Capt. Gross said.

“In this day and age of denial-of-service attacks, cyber hacking and internet security our biggest issue is keeping our network safe from intrusion. We believe FirstNet is assisting us in keeping our communication and data systems secure from that threat.”

“Officer safety is the biggest risk you face without proper communication.”

Lt. Kathy Curtice,
Fresno Sheriff’s Office



Communication during wildfires

In 2020 and 2021, Fresno County had devastating fires and evacuations. The fires were in remote areas, where radios and regular cellular service was unavailable. And communication was critical for the safety of deputies and the general public.

Without a cell signal, the only communication for first responders was over the radio. And communication using a radio was limited. So, the Fresno County Sheriff’s Office requested FirstNet Satellite Cells on Light Trucks to assist.

“Having the SAT/COLT deployed to our remote command center allowed us to communicate with our deputies and to reach our remote residents for safety and evacuations as it became necessary,” said Lt. Curtice.

“Officer safety is the biggest risk you face without proper communication. It is vital that you always know the location of your personnel. Without proper communication, location information and updates are limited.”

Joining FirstNet

Fresno was the first California county to adopt FirstNet and the City of Fresno Police Department soon followed. FirstNet use has continued to expand throughout the county. The county’s IT Department has also joined. And others are in the process, including the Probation Department.



When Fresno County initially joined FirstNet, officials ran a mock search and rescue mission in the Sierra Nevada Mountain Range.

Sheriff Mims said she wasn’t thinking about being first when she made the decision to join FirstNet.

“To me, it was clear that adopting the best communication technology for my personnel was the right thing to do. My entire career has been about keeping people safe. Anytime we have a tool like FirstNet that can help me keep people safe, I’m going to be all-in.”