

Tompkins County Department of Emergency Response  
FirstNet Information Sheet for Town of Caroline

“FirstNet” is the name given the fledgling National Public Safety Broadband System, a carrier network exclusively dedicated for use by first responders. The federal government awarded multi-year operating rights to AT&T, which pledged to build-out the nationwide network within stringent requirements for signal coverage, security, priority access and pre-emption capability.

FirstNet was awarded a significant band of radio frequencies (“Band 14,” 700 MHz, frequencies adjacent to those used by Tompkins County in its land mobile radio system (LMR)) for exclusive deployment in the system, and AT&T pledged to leverage current and future assets, including its wireless frequencies and infrastructure, to host, support and supplement the new network.

AT&T has thus been incentivized to expand its wireless footprint to meet these extensive coverage requirements and is constructing at least two new transmission sites throughout the country.

Tompkins County has long encouraged carrier networks to improve their coverage throughout the jurisdiction and has promoted the use of its own LMR radio system infrastructure (sites and towers) for potential co-location.

There has been minimal interest by carriers to use Tompkins’ rural sites because of the limited commercial market that exists in these sparsely populated areas. Additionally, the site locations do not significantly enhance many carrier’s coverage footprints and only offer incremental improvements in their coverage.

AT&T has recently indicated its intention to add sites in Tompkins County to improve coverage for both its own network and for FirstNet. These new sites will utilize AT&T’s legacy frequencies, in addition to Band 14.

The proposed Caroline site establishes significant coverage along the Rt. 79E corridor, between the Towns of Ithaca and Richford, the heavily traveled Coddington Road corridor and throughout the Brooktondale/Slaterville area, all of which have been considered “dead spots” for pretty much all wireless services. The nearest county-owned sites will not work to fill-in AT&T’s coverage gaps - the locations do not play in to the desired coverage area.

The new site will be of significant public benefit as area residents and travelers will find network coverage and be able to call 9-1-1 on that network. The new site will enhance global positioning capabilities for AT&T users and better provide dispatchers caller location data.

Most importantly to this office, the deployment of FirstNet’s frequencies on this tower will enable greatly expanded use of the County’s mobile data system. In an area of heavy travel and rural emergency response, wireless coverage for both voice and data services is of necessity to the somewhat isolated and limited pockets of responders. In many cases, fire, EMS & law enforcement responders are “all alone” when responding to incidents in the target area, and back-up is at a distance.

Communications assets, both voice and data, become critical tools for the tracking of these responders and for providing on-going information and intelligence. The FirstNet System by AT&T will significantly enhance the communications and data capabilities in much of the Town of Caroline.

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