# Best Practice: Comprehensive City-wide Security System

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**CITY: LONDON** **POLICY AREA: SAFETY & SECURITY**

## BEST PRACTICE

In July 1993, the City of London Police began the installation of a "Ring of Steel" security system to cover the City of London, the borders of which primarily includes London's financial district. The system includes hundreds of closed circuit (CCTV) surveillance cameras and license plate readers. The system enables the City of London Police to monitor suspicious activity and thereby thwart terrorist attacks. The system has also reduced the number of road access points to the area and installed checkpoints (sentry boxes) at the access points. The City of London Police has also worked with city planners to bolster the system by narrowing roads entering the city in order to force drivers to slow down so that CCTV cameras can record license plate numbers.

## ISSUE

In the 1990s, the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA) inflicted a bombing campaign in the City of London. It was then that the City of London Police, in cooperation with the City of London Corporation, began to impose traffic restrictions and police checkpoints. The Ring of Steel security zone was installed in 1993 and was expanded twice; once in 1996 and in 2002 with new police checkpoints and the restructuring of traffic.

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The goals of the security system are as follows:

- To keep London residents safe
- To be able to identify every vehicle license plate number in the city of London
- To be able to identify the front seat passengers in each vehicle, thereby deterring any vehicle born bombs as well as deny criminals the use of the road
- To provide intelligence to other security agencies
- To coordinate the efforts of security agencies

## IMPLEMENTATION

In 1993, by use of planning legislation, three hundred access points to the city of London were reduced to the current maximum of sixteen. The sixteen access points are monitored by fixed CCTV cameras which are linked to automatic license plate number readers. The images from the cameras are sent back to police headquarters where the readers identify the license plate numbers and will automatically send those plate numbers to be matched against the police national computer. The police national computer holds details of all vehicles that are of interest to the police and within four seconds the control room can be alerted if a vehicle of police interest enters the city of London. Using over one hundred CCTV cameras positioned on the streets, operators within the control room are able to identify and locate a vehicle of interest and direct officers to intercept if appropriate. The City of London Police have mapped the location and possible views of over 2,000 private CCTV cameras and has engaged in a partnership with the owners of those cameras to share the images should a crime be committed on the street.

## COST

The total cost of the system is approximately 2.8 million British pounds ($4.24 million USD), which represents 0.8% of the total cost of the damage of the bombs inflicted on the city of London in the 1992 St. Mary Axe bombing and the 1993 Bishopsgate bombing.

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## RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The City of London Police reads approximately 48 million vehicle license plate numbers per year, identifies 1-2 stolen vehicles per week and arrests approximately 250 wanted suspects per year directly as a result of the license plate reading system. Data is collected monthly for internal use and monitoring. Before the CCTV surveillance system was in use, the City of London Police were only able to identify a few stolen vehicles per year.

## TIMELINE

| | |
|---|---|
| July 1993 | Security zone implemented |
| July 1997 | Implementation of the automatic number plate reading system |
| December 2003 | System-wide coverage of the entire area of the city of London |
| May 2010 | Mayor Michael Bloomberg's second visit |

## LEGISLATION

To begin installing the security system, planning legislation was invoked. However, there is now an anti-terrorist traffic regulation order which can be enforced under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 and has been used to improve the security around the US Embassy in London

## LESSONS LEARNED

The City of London Police note the following difficulties and challenges faced by the implementation of the system:

- Some people view the system as a threat to civil liberties and privacy rights.
- It is challenging to assure residents that the City of London Police will only collect and retain information for appropriate uses, such as identifying a vehicle involved in criminal activity, and will not be abused to violate privacy.
- When the system was launched, is was in the wake of two devastating bombings in London which focused public attention on the threat of terrorist activity, thus making it easier to enact the security system. However, more about civil liberties have recently surfaced, proving it more challenging for the City of London Police to explain that information collected is used only for crime investigations and not for civil cases without instruction from the courts.

## TRANSFERABILITY

In order to implement a CCTV security system, a city would need to be able to collect images of license plate numbers and have developed a database that can be cross-checked against the numbers. In addition, the city would need sufficient personnel and inter-agency coordination to be able to respond to a threat. This, along with support from city planners, city officials, the business community and the public enable the system to be successful.

## CONTACTS

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Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.