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Richard Barnes
Chair of the 7 July Review Committee
London Assembly
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20 February 2007

Dear Richard

Airwave rollout and use of alternative radio communications within British Transport Police

Thank you for your letter of 8 February.

British Transport Police (BTP) has now fully migrated to Airwave. The only areas where coverage is currently not provided are the subterranean stations in Liverpool (Merseyrail system) and the deep London Underground stations, which are covered by BTP's Channel 2 radio network. However, work undertaken by the Airwave on London Underground Project Board is progressing on schedule, and all of London Underground stations are due to have Airwave coverage by Spring of this year.

In relation to lessons learned by BTP during the rollout of Airwave, I list the following points:

- In identifying its coverage requirements, BTP took the view that Home Office police forces would, in general, specify a high level of requirement to O2 Airwave. BTP's project team visited each local force at the coverage planning stage, and from these visits identified any gaps that BTP needed to fill. Where it proved operationally necessary, BTP specified an additional coverage requirement. It was beneficial, in both time and cost, to share work with other Airwave users rather than start from scratch.
- The importance of radio security and asset management was crucial. The auditing of radio assets is a labour intensive activity. It is essential that organisations use a dedicated database to track its radios. BTP does this, but there is still a reliance on each individual officer to update the records, and good supervision to ensure this happens is essential.

- Timely delivery of user training is paramount. Training should be completed just before officers go out on patrol with their new Airwave radio.
- It is important that organisations understand how the technology works. It is sometimes too easy to accept the 'sales pitch', which is not always wholly accurate.
- Organisations must understand the resilience and fall-back arrangements embedded in the Airwave contract and how they apply to them.
- The faster an organisation is able to migrate to Airwave the better as this negates or minimises the need to carry two radios, and users will be on a common system quicker. BTP rolled out the new system as soon as it became available in each Home Office force area.

Following the meeting last November, I tasked my office to look into alternative technologies for use as a back up in the event of Airwave not functioning underground. The Airwave on London Underground Project Board hosted a meeting with a company that presented a stand alone radio solution for underground environments. Following this meeting, the Project Board agreed that there was no merit in looking any further than Airwave for London Underground communications. The fixed Airwave system will be extremely resilient by design, but if it does fail for any length of time then there is an Emergency Response Vehicle capability that can provide communications where they are needed. In addition, officers will still be able to use their Airwave radios in 'direct mode' so there will not be an absolute loss of communications.

If I can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Andrew Trotter
Deputy Chief Constable