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Despite two terrorist incidents, Londoners continue to crowd into Underground stations and onto the red double-decker buses.



Photos Courtesy of Transit Services Bureau

Transit Police Chief's London Visit Was an Eye-Opener

- Finkelstein was impressed by British determination and high-tech surveillance equipment

By BILL HEARD, Editor

(Aug. 2, 2005) Londoners were still recovering from the first bombings of three subway trains and a city bus when Metro Transit Police Chief Capt. Dan Finkelstein visited the city in mid-July to meet with police officials. The second series of attacks occurred as he was flying home.

The fact-finding trip left him deeply impressed with the determination of British citizens to soldier on and with the actions of law enforcement in tracking down the terrorists. He was awed by the high-tech surveillance equipment that was a key element in their investigations.

During the week-long visit to London, Finkelstein, Lt. Leo Norton of the Metrolink security force, a sergeant from the Sheriff's Emergency Operations Center and a bomb squad sergeant, met with officers from the Metropolitan Police, the City of London Police and the British Transport Police.

They also talked with patrol officers who had responded within moments to the bombings and with those who directed the investigations.



Lt. Leo Norton, left, of the Sheriff's Metrolink Bureau and Metro Transit Police Chief Capt. Dan Finkelstein, far right, talked with members of the British Transport Police during their recent visit to London.

Powerful surveillance cameras

The exhaustive effort of identifying the first four terrorists and, later, the search for those involved in the second, unsuccessful attacks, were greatly aided by a highly sophisticated network of powerful surveillance cameras that can pan, tilt and – most importantly – zoom in tight on a person or object.

“I was highly impressed with the clarity of the cameras,” says Finkelstein, who watched as one camera zoomed in on tourists across the width of the Thames River. “You could see very small details from a distance. I could have recognized someone if I knew them.”

The camera system also allows officers working at a Metropolitan Police control center to select an Underground station, choose a station level and activate the exact camera needed to view an area. The system also continually records scenes for later review.

In the City of London financial district, cameras photograph the license plate of every car that drives into the one-square-mile area, Finkelstein says. Police immediately check for outstanding warrants against the owner and can follow the car – camera to camera – throughout the district. About 300 arrests are made this way each year.



Resolute Londoners placed this memorial at Tavistock Square, sight of the July 7 bus terrorist bombing. At right, a red, white and blue gesture of defiance hangs from a fence near the King's Cross Underground station.

Local businesses help

These cameras are supplemented by thousands of surveillance cameras used by local businesses that can be called upon to provide film to police during an investigation.

The City of London Police also operate a cell phone text messaging system that can instantly reach some 24,000 subscribers who commute by rail to and from the financial district.

"If something happens that patrons need to know – and it could be as benign as a train breakdown or as serious as a terrorist attack – the control center officer types out a short message and sends it to the list of subscribers," says Finkelstein. "That way to communicate with riders is something worth exploring."

As chief of the Sheriff's Transit Services Bureau with responsibility for security on Metro Buses and Metro Rail, Finkelstein believes the real value of his visit to London was to personally experience the aftermath of the bombing.

First-hand experience

"I needed to talk first-hand with riders and with police officers on the street," he says. "I needed to look at local newspapers to see the tone of the news about the bombings and watch the TV talk shows."

Finkelstein found that, despite the attacks, the trains were packed with commuters standing shoulder to shoulder. "They said, 'This is how we get to work. We will not change our lives, because that means the terrorists have won.'"

Since Finkelstein has returned to the office, the lessons from his London visit have come up many times in conversations with fellow law enforcement officers and during media interviews.

"Everyone wants to know what we're doing to protect our system here in comparison to London," he says. "I can speak to that a lot better now, because I was there and experienced it."