

Communication the key to effective policing

Police Communications Centres, located at major police centres throughout Queensland, are hubs of electronic activity and they buzz with their own distinctive energy.

The transfer of messages zipping back and forth from sender to receiver is a progression of the 1949 transmission model of communication, operating in a modern environment.

From the 1940s to today, police communication techniques have consistently employed the most state-of-the-art equipment of the era and they continue to evolve.

Compared to today's technology, some of the first wireless radio units could be described as nothing short of primitive.

In the 1930s, criminals were becoming more mobile, and the speed of communication became a pressing issue. The first three police vehicles fitted with wireless technology in 1935 had messages transmitted to them from a temporary wireless station.

In 1941 the increasing use of police radio informed the decision to erect a permanent wireless station at the grounds of the police depot in Petrie Terrace.

The building was outfitted with the most modern equipment available for efficient transmission to not only patrol cars, but police departments in other states.

Communications improved in 1951 with the opening of the Central Communications Room at the Criminal

Investigation Branch, at what is now called Tourism House in Brisbane's Makerston Street.

It was connected by four landlines to the police wireless station and became the new nerve centre of police communications in the state, focusing on the accurate and expedient delivery



A portable emergency radio base set up beside a police vehicle, circa 1951.

of information to first responders.

The department's wireless system featured direct radio-telephone communication between 10 base stations in south east Queensland, which allowed the continuous exchange of messages with mobile patrol units.

This technology was improved upon in the 1960s with the extension of the two-way radio telephone service to more centres, a second FM channel in the state's south east and the provision of motorcycles fitted with radio units.

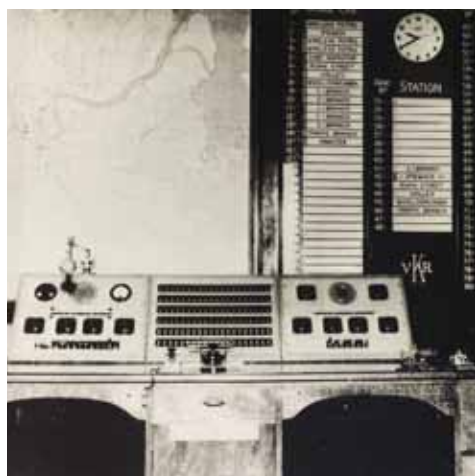
It was 1962 before the communications centre made its trek to new headquarters at Roma Street, unifying new communication technologies and streamlining the wireless section, communications room and the major incident

room for the first time under one roof.

From here in the 1970s, the department began switching over to UHF with the first transceiver installed in 1971 to communicate with beat patrols in the City, Fortitude Valley and the Woolloongabba business districts.

Telex machines were introduced in 1974, and in April 1980, a new computerised message switching system was put into use throughout the state.

This provided Queensland with one of the most sophisticated police communication systems in Australia, sporting a second UHF channel installed in Brisbane that allowed one channel to be used for emergencies.



Operators of this radio control desk at the Petrie Terrace depot, 1943, referred to the list of call signs visible on the wall.

1886

1935 Three patrol cars are equipped with wireless to receive messages transmitted from a temporary wireless station.

1941 A permanent two-way radio station is established to replace the temporary one-way process used since 1935.

1951 Central communication room comes into operation at the Criminal Investigation Branch. It has four landlines and becomes the nerve centre of communications in the state.

By 1990, the newly erected headquarters building on the corner of Roma and Makerston Streets incorporated a refurbished communications area, embracing digital technology to provide not only faster and more effective control for first response officers, but the added security of data storage.

Duty Officer Senior Sergeant Ian Elder has worked in the Police Communications Centre for more than 30 years. He not only remembers some of the major shifts in technology spanning the past three decades, but has played an instrumental role in the process.

Senior Sergeant Elder said first responders deserved all the technological advantages they could access to meet the daily responsibility of protecting and serving their communities.

"Improved information storage moved us away from a time-consuming, paper-

based filing system," Senior Sergeant Elder said.

"First response officers now have the technology to have history stored and information retrieved at their fingertips. Having access to intelligence or history at their disposal can only improve officer safety; in a second they can validate an address and assess the risks."

Incorporated into the communications area is the Major Incident Room (MIR), which police and other agencies use when a coordinated response to a major incident is required. Senior Sergeant Elder said he remembered the MIR as having two upgrades since its conception.

"It was refurbished once in the year 2000 for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting and again in 2008 to make the change from analogue to digital," Senior Sergeant Elder said.

"The main reason for the refurbishment was to address a combination of major



Call-takers in the Police Communications Centre in 1979, in the Makerston Street headquarters, now known as Tourism House.

transport coordination issues and incidents relating to terrorist threats which every police service has implemented in Australia.

"This gives a greater capacity for monitoring an incident such as a serious crash or a large, organised event such as Riverfire. It increases the opportunity for monitoring incident scenes via CCTV as we can tag onto Brisbane City Council cameras across the city.

"With new communications technologies, first responders, and especially incident commanders, can deploy available resources in a more efficient and effective manner. For example, a crash on the Story Bridge could cost hundreds of thousands of dollars if it has the potential to halt traffic.

"As well as monitoring these potential issues, we can assess our operational response to such incidents in real time and amend our strategy accordingly."

*By Chrissie McLeod,
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In September 2009 the North Coast Region Police Communications Centre was officially opened. Located at Maroochydore, the centre has amalgamated communications services for three of the region's busiest districts: Caboolture, Redcliffe and the Sunshine Coast. The new facility includes dedicated major incident and training rooms, ergonomically designed workstations and the most advanced critical communications systems available.

1962

The Communications Centre moves to Police Headquarters, comprising the wireless section, communications room and the major incident room.

1990

The Computer Aided Despatch system is introduced.

2004

Secure digital radio networks are established throughout the greater Brisbane area.

2009

North Coast Region Police Communications Centre commences operation.

→ 2009