

Police innovations combat CBD crime

By Brett Davis, Media and Public Affairs Branch



Constables Tom Wilson and Mark Eaton, City Station, patrol the Brisbane central business district.

Photo by Karen Crook, Media and Public Affairs Branch.



Officers working the city streets are forever vigilant when faced with unknown circumstances.

Safety, levels of violence and other crime in Brisbane's inner city are issues that have come under increasing scrutiny in recent weeks.

Two fatal assaults and a number of violent incidents since the beginning of the year has focused public and media attention on the role of police and other key groups in responding to such problems.

After a summit convened by Premier Peter Beattie and attended by government agencies, police, community leaders and industry representatives, the 17-point Brisbane City Safety Action Plan was released.

Part of the plan relates to police and the allocation of resources and rostering, the creation of a district liquor strategy and enforcement program, liaison with the Brisbane City Council and a review of the *Bail Act*.

Brisbane Central District Acting Superintendent Glenn Horton said a range of strategies were in place, with others being advanced to actively prevent crime and increase public safety in the central business district (CBD).

"Guided by research, intelligence and other relevant information, we have developed some innovative police responses to combat crime in the CBD," he said.

PROJECT ATLAS

One of the new initiatives is Project Atlas, which will result in the creation of a database detailing security camera resources of all government departments and private organisations in the city.

This system would contain detailed information of the areas captured by each of the security cameras in the CBD.

Senior Sergeant Darin Ferguson, Officer in Charge, Brisbane City Police Division, who is overseeing the project, said the database would

also contain protocols on who to contact and how to obtain the footage from that particular establishment.

"For instance, you can go to a place and say 'Your cameras may have captured an offence taking place and can we please view your footage?'"

Senior Sergeant Ferguson said while the database would primarily be used to assist with investigations, it also had other positive applications.

"We can use the database to liaise with businesses and let them know of particular crime trends in their area, or provide information so they can be on the lookout for anything suspicious or for certain people if we have a description," he said.

"It will be a method to distribute intelligence bulletins and is a very quick and effective means of transmitting that information to all those people on the Project Atlas list.

"But it is also a two-way street and enables them to contact us and let us know if there is something going on," Senior Sergeant Ferguson said.



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Data collection for the project began last month with general duties officers from Brisbane Central Police District allocated certain areas to survey.

It is expected that phase one of the project, covering the area bounded by Ann Street and the Brisbane River, will be completed by June 30.

Phase two, including from Ann Street, Boundary Street and to Countess Street will be finished in September.

Senior Sergeant Ferguson has also carried out a reorganisation of the rostering system in the district, which was one of the 17 points put forward in the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan.

“Through using intelligence and problem solving, we ascertained when our busy times were – which is between 10pm and 4am – and altered the rostering accordingly.

“Now we have greater flexibility and a better capacity to put extra officers on in peak times while not compromising the functions we have to perform during the day,” he said.

OPERATION TAXI WATCH

Another initiative to be launched in Brisbane Central Police District is Operation Taxi Watch, developed by Inspector Ben Hanbidge.

This is an initiative between the Queensland Police Service and the Yellow and Black and White cab companies being trialled in the CBD from April.

When an incident such as a serious assault or robbery occurs in the city or Fortitude Valley, the Police Communications Centre would pass on the information to the taxi despatch centre, which would in turn relay the information to their drivers on the street.

“There can be in excess of 1,600 taxis in Brisbane at peak times on a busy night, so this gives police a lot more “eyes and ears”, and is

another way we can gain more assistance and help from the community,” Inspector Hanbidge said.

“The taxi companies have been only too happy to be involved and to take part in the initiative.”

If the trial in the city proves to be a success, it could be expanded into other suburbs.

As with many new policing initiatives, the idea for the project came out of the regular problem solving process.

“We continually scan the local environment and look for ways to improve our policing responses, and the idea for this initiative arose out of that process several months ago.

“The QPS is always looking for new strategies to implement in the city to improve the service we provide and increase the effectiveness of our operations,” Inspector Hanbidge said.

Positive policing and public safety strategies are not restricted to special initiatives but are part of everyday police work in the city.

BRISBANE CENTRAL CRIME PREVENTION OFFICE

At the forefront of this effort is the Brisbane Central Crime Prevention Office (BCCPO), which undertakes numerous approaches to anticipate and deter criminal activity.

Various groups within the unit meet to share information, develop proactive strategies to deal with ongoing situations and also to design responses to specific incidents.

For example, in conjunction with the Brisbane City Council, the BCCPO conducts events, such as barbecues and sporting activities (basketball and rock climbing), in King George Square for street kids.

Sergeant Don Dull, BCCPO said the main aim of these events was to get at risk youths into



Senior Sergeant Ferguson talks to officers within his division as they patrol Brisbane streets and parks.



Senior Sergeant Darin Ferguson,
Officer in Charge, Brisbane City
Police Division.

activities to better occupy their time and break down barriers between them and police.

“The BCCPO also runs a service for business owners or victims of burglary, where they conduct a security audit of a premises and give advice on how to best protect the building,” he said.

“We also work closely with licensed premises in the education process with management, staff and security personnel to train them on matters like responsible service of alcohol and general security.

“Basically, there is a lot of prevention, education and working with interested groups to try and come up with some common ground and devise solutions for situations where there are not always easy answers,” Sergeant Dull said.

LEAPS PROJECT

The liquor and hotels industry has been under the spotlight because of the role alcohol has played in many of the recent violent incidents in the city.

A Queensland University of Technology study commissioned by the QPS in 2004 found that of the more than 31,000 incidents in the sample period, 24% were alcohol-related and officers spent 26% of their time on these matters.

The QPS Liquor Unit was established in the Central Brisbane Police District at the beginning of December last year, and introduced the Liquor Enforcement and Proactive Strategies (LEAPS) Project.

Establishing the unit and introducing this project was another suggestion in the 17-point Brisbane City Safety Action Plan released at the end of February by the state government.

Inspector Joe Joyce from the Central Brisbane Liquor Unit said the LEAPS Project was a strategy that involved gathering intelligence, forming committees to work with other government agencies and engaging the community to deal with liquor-related issues.

“This has a positive effect on things like assaults and public disorder offences,” Inspector Joyce said.

Historical data and intelligence gathered from officers submitting Liquor Incident Reports is analysed to identify trends and potential trouble spots.

Officers then liaise with other agencies such as the Office of Fair Trading, Brisbane City Council, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Liquor Licensing to formulate action plans and conduct inspections.

Inspector Joyce said officers also worked with patrons, staff and management at licensed premises to encourage them to regulate themselves rather than having to be constantly policed.

“Prevention is better than cure and that is pretty much accepted right across society.

“If we can prevent these alcohol-related incidents by engaging with the community, enforcing the regulations and using the powers we already have then that has to have a positive effect,” he said.