

Some Considerations for a Public Space Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) System

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CCTV is frequently advocated as a crime prevention strategy, especially for town centre and pedestrian mall environments. Sometimes the calls to use CCTV bear little or no relationship to the (somewhat limited) existing research evidence. One of the most significant research studies (undertaken by Farrington and Welsh), involving a meta-analysis of research findings from 41 studies (22 of which relate to city or town centre systems), stated the following:

“Results of this review indicate that CCTV has a modest but significant desirable effect on crime, is most effective in reducing crime in car parks, is most effective when targeted at vehicle crimes (largely a function of the successful car park schemes), and is more effective in reducing crime in the United Kingdom than in other countries. These results lend support for the continued use of CCTV to prevent crime in public space, but suggest that it be more narrowly targeted than its present use would indicate. Future CCTV schemes should employ high-quality evaluation designs with long follow-up periods”.¹ They further stated that “exactly what the optimal circumstances are for effective use of CCTV schemes is not entirely clear at present”.ⁱⁱ

These statements are more cautious than some of the claims of advocates of CCTV.

Before determining if a CCTV system will be effective at reducing crime in a public space area, it is important to consider how the system will operate. The success of a CCTV system is dependent upon all of components working effectively. The following table, (adapted from Clancey, G. (2009) ‘Considerations for Establishing a Public Space CCTV Network’, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra), highlights some of the most important considerations when deciding if a CCTV system will be installed.

CCTV System Component	Key Considerations	Examples for Review
Camera	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What cameras to purchase? • How to protect the cameras from damage? • How many cameras are needed? • Where to position the cameras? • Will they be wireless or operate on an optic fibre platform? • How often will they be cleaned and require maintenance? • What signage is required to inform the public of their operation? • What requirements are there for installation (including excavation)? • What fixtures, trees and lighting will need to be altered to enable the cameras to work effectively? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pan, tilt, zoom (PTZ) cameras will be required for greatest manoeuvrability. • Camera domes and cameras positioned to prevent easy access will prevent damage. • Good visual fields are promoted by dense camera coverage. Tracking offenders will be aided by a dense system of cameras. • Cameras must be located in key areas. • Optic fibre cabling is still used in many systems due to reliability. • Uncleaned cameras and domes obstruct vision. Quarterly cleaning maintains vision. • Signage will have to be erected within the CCTV system area. • Boring and laying conduit for the optic fibre is very expensive. • Once locations of cameras are identified, obstructions to vision will have to be removed and lighting improved.
Monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the cameras be monitored? If so on what basis? • Who will monitor the cameras? • How will these staff be trained and what ongoing training will they receive? • What type of control room is required? • Where will it be located? • Who will have access to the control room? • Will there be a supervisor / supervisors? • What will the staff to monitor ratio be? • What communication systems will operate? • What relationship will exist between police and the control room? • What instructions will be provided to guide the work of control room staff? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring improves effectiveness of crime detection. Peak periods might be monitored. • Trained control room operators are recommended. • Staff should be trained in the technical features of the system and be given guidance on what they should be looking for. • There are different standards of control room. The number of monitors and data storage will be two critical considerations for a control room. Back-up energy and data protection will also be required. • The control room should be away from public vision. • Protocols should dictate who can gain entry. • More strategic functions should sit with a supervisor. • There are physical limits to the number of screens that can be monitored effectively. • Direct communication with police will facilitate quicker response times. • Some systems provide monitors to police stations. • Standard operating procedures should govern the work of control room staff.
Footage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What file size will be used to store the footage? • What system will be used to store the footage? • How long will footage be stored for? • How will police and external agencies access footage? • Who will process requests for footage? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Storage capacities are improving, reducing the need for large computer processing units. • Internet protocol (IP) systems are increasingly being used. • 28 days is frequently the period for storage. • Clear procedures should be established for accessing images, including for media. • Control room staff generally complete such requests during their daily duties.
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will develop the Code of Practice and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) guiding the operation of the system? • What will be the central focus of the CCTV system (i.e. what crimes will be targeted)? • What auditing and evaluation procedures will be adopted? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are many existing examples that can be utilised to inform local SOPs and Code of Practice documentation. • Identifying the specific objectives of the system ensures related procedures match objectives. • Some authorities utilise external consultants to periodically audit the operation of the system.

Not until all of these issues have been thoroughly considered and analysed, should approval be granted to install a CCTV system in a public space. The costs of installation, ongoing monitoring costs, regular maintenance and periodic system upgrades are just some of the initial and recurrent costs associated with CCTV systems. The installation of a CCTV system will inevitably impact upon the ability of a local government authority to fund other crime prevention initiatives, so careful consideration must be given to these issues.

¹ Welsh, B. and Farrington, D. (2008) **Effects of Closed Circuit Television Surveillance on Crime**, The Campbell Collaboration, Campbell Systematic Reviews 2008:17, page 2.

ⁱⁱ Ibid, page 19.