

# SECURITY MAKEOVER SAVES CITY

Security can help transform a city from a black spot to hot spot, finds **Rod Cowan\***, on a recent visit to Queensland's Ipswich City.

To get to Ipswich City you take a train from Brisbane's Roma Street station to what locals call "the end of the line."

When the mayor there, Paul Pisasale, was first elected in 1991, Ipswich had the country's highest crime and unemployment rates, the media would invariably refer to the city as a national black spot, and residents called Pisasale daily to remind him.

"When I first got elected, I thought mayor meant blame him for everything," says Pisasale, who lives his passion at hyper-speed (his staff call him ricochet, because he appears to be everywhere). He's a guy who acts, makes things happen, gets things done.

"The first thing I did was hire a company with all these dogs," says Pisasale.

It worked for a while. Well, for a week or so.

"Then [the dogs] started eating the parking meter inspectors and anyone else who had a helmet, so I knew that wasn't working and it created a problem."

OK, the dogs didn't work out so well. How about CCTV cameras all over the place? Even if it doesn't achieve that much, it is the perfect political panacea to any crime problem: something you can do and be seen to be doing.

"It had to be more than that, really. It had to have everybody working together in partnership," says Pisasale. "What we have

got to do in this country is stop laying blame. We all have responsibilities. Safe City is sharing that responsibility. Sharing the load."

He called in a security consultant, Stacey Kirmos, to talk about creating a safe city. The end result of that conversation, 15 years on, is one of the country's most sophisticated surveillance systems as part of a wider program "guided by common sense," drawing together police, state and federal government bodies, community groups and business representatives.

"I now realise that my responsibility is to act as a catalyst," says Pisasale.

The biggest challenge, he says, was breaking down barriers between the various levels of government, the police and the community, all of which had their own positions (and inevitably, their own solutions).

"What I did was take away all the barriers and say, Hey, listen folks, forget about who we are, it's not about our titles or our positions, it's our responsibilities. Take away the barriers! Now we have got a safe community where everybody is playing a role and the baddies are losing."

Kirmos, who has stayed on as the security advisor and Safe City co-ordinator, a contract position which goes through a periodic tender, says the early meetings were mostly about building relationships.

"Once we had broken down those barriers, then we had that communication between the departments and all the various people that we needed to partner with. What we had to do was, first of all, get the confidence of everyone that where we were heading as a council with them was the right direction," says Kirmos.



“Then we needed to have the will of the police to trust us, and the integrity of what we were doing to partner with them, so that they would not feel threatened. That we were not quasi-police, we were not gung-ho, that we were completely trained to the highest level that you could be trained. That’s where our partnership started to evolve.

“This has been recognised as the best private/police partnership anywhere in Australia. It didn’t come easy. I must admit, right from the word go, we had to do a lot of proving ourselves, that we had the intellectual ability to work alongside a trained police officer.”

The Safe City program is best known for its CCTV control room, and it is easy to see why. Two operators monitor 24/7 a video wall displaying scenes from 185 cameras around the area. Seven nodes in a complex network simultaneously deliver footage from analogue cameras in digital form to be stored on a bank of 150 plus terabyte servers sitting in a room behind the video wall. Images of a quality acceptable to magistrates as evidence can be sent to the Ipswich police communication centre and local police beats. Through one door is a meeting room with a window along one wall looking into the control room. Another door leads to a police office, which houses two full-time officers complemented by other officers, depending on the workload.

Working so closely with the police, the operators employed by SECUREcorp, one of Australia’s largest providers of retail security, which has held the contract for six years have become a valuable policing resource, not least of which because of their local knowledge.

“We know exactly who’s who in the city. We may hear a broadcast over the radio and we would automatically know by the description who that person is and go straight back to the police and give them that information,” says Kirmos.

Police have benefited in other ways, too. For example, the council has provided vehicles for the local crime prevention team, trail bikes to tackle unruly trail bike riders, and push bikes for inner city patrols, as well as administering funding for crime prevention programs from various government departments, with the cash going straight to the police.

Electronic surveillance fit for futuristic movies – operators use joysticks to control the cameras and monitors, although the system has a capacity to operate with hand movements through the air is one thing. But what makes it really work are the programs, protocols, training, response procedures, and public education efforts around them. While some of the programs take a broader view of community safety, such as youth initiatives, the main aim is reducing crime.

Academics may quibble about the results and more than a few do but, argues Kirmos, crime prevention can skew statistics, in that increased awareness means more crimes being reported.

He remains adamant: “Many years ago people said Ipswich was the worst place to live, yet our crime trends have reversed completely. Since the inception of the Safe City, partnership



Mayor Paul Pisasale

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with government and police has reduced crime by 78% over the last 15 years, and in some cases we have reduced crime by 90%.”

Maybe so, but not everyone likes to be watched.

“The way we are watching you and the level we are watching you is in proportion to your degree of stupidity. If you are not doing anything wrong, you have got nothing to worry about,” says Pisasale.

Kirmos says he addressed civil libertarians’ concerns by going directly to them.

“At the time we started this program, I actually contacted the representatives of civil liberties in Queensland, and I said: This is our plan, this is what our intention is. Now, this part of the program involves electronic surveillance and on top of that program is a number of programs that are integrated that gives us eyes and the ability to record what is actually happening in a public space,” says Kirmos. “I asked them for their opinion and I fully respected they had a place in life I understand the civil libertarians point of view and we have proved the cameras and the way [the program] is designed as an audited system.”

The system, he points out, can be audited at any time, material can be produced for freedom of information requests, and the council maintains a policy of total transparency, which extends to individuals and community groups visiting the control room. Business and community groups are even encouraged to hold meetings in the training room, after which a demonstration and talk is given about Safe City.

“We are not a closed door [with] Big Brother cameras,” says Kirmos. “The reality is that this belongs to the community. The community has a right to know what goes on.”

Transparency, he adds, builds public confidence and enthusiasm.

New residents and businesses are also encouraged to understand the program, which further builds buy-in, and goes beyond the standard crime prevention advice about lights, sight-lines and hedge trimming.

“It is a very casual approach,” says Kirmos. “People coming into the region to our economic development department are told about the Safe City program, so if there are any questions about crime, levels of crime, what happens with certain days, hours of operation they may wish to operate under, we are able to answer those questions in all good faith, in conjunction with the police.”

Building such a comprehensive program takes time.

“How did we build Safe City – One step at a time. Every building block came together and we were able to achieve something that is probably a very expensive model to put together,” says Pisasale.

That’s the other thing it takes: money. And, any council struggles with funding, whether for footpaths or crime prevention.

Early funding for Safe City came from the likes of Queensland State Government dollar-for-dollar grants for crime prevention and revenue raised from levies on local businesses

## SEVEN STEPS TO A SAFER CITY

1. Build partnerships and break down barriers by focusing on responsibilities.
2. Make crime prevention everybody’s responsibility.
3. Take a building block approach and keep coming back to the aim.
4. Be transparent to overcome fears and create interest.
5. Remember, electronic security is only part of the picture.
6. Look beyond crime statistics to measure results.
7. Success demands the political will and support to make it happen. (You could try electing Paul Pisasale as your local mayor.)

based on land holding value.

Raising the cash, however, should not be the most pressing issue, Pisasale maintains.

“When you are worrying about money you are not going to achieve it. Worry about the product you want to deliver, who the partners are, and how everybody can share the load. Don’t let money be your driving force. Don’t be process driven, be outcome driven,” says Pisasale. “The money you invest is insignificant to the return.”

Measuring return, he adds, means looking at areas such as court costs being reduced (when presented with video evidence, the chances of a guilty plea are increased), growth in economic prosperity, and improved public perceptions.

“Look, if you don’t have a safe city, you are not going to attract the tourists. More importantly, you are not going to have young kids wanting to go out in the streets and enjoy their own city. A safe city is one that everybody can enjoy, going shopping without having to worry about someone going to hinder them, or someone going to use foul language,” says Pisasale. “Invest in a safe city, and it won’t let you down.”

Through media coverage, crime prevention conferences, and word-of-mouth in the security community, the Safe City program has attracted wide-spread attention, including visitors from across the country and overseas.

Attention which Pisasale welcomes, because he also wants to help other councils and communities.

“Don’t try and reinvent the wheel. We are happy to share what we have gained over the last 15 years,” says Pisasale. “If you try to build it, folks, my comment is: build it in partnership with everybody and it will be an affordable product, it will be a reliable product, but more importantly, it will create a safe city that all can enjoy.”

A good starting point being the end of the line from Roma Street station.