

Coroner's Inquests into the London Bombings of 7 July 2005

Hearing transcripts - 1 March 2011 - Afternoon session

1 (2.10 pm)

2 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Mr Keith?

3 MR KEITH: Mr A'Court, you were just assisting us with the
4 description of the process by which the replacement main
5 scheme radio came into being?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. You describe how the office of the Deputy Prime Minister
8 intervened after 9/11?

9 A. That's right.

10 Q. Was that office involved because consideration had to be
11 given to replacement of radio systems across the
12 country, all the fire rescue services?

13 A. I think they were having a look to the future and
14 anticipating that all fire rescue services would require
15 a replacement main scheme radio system, but partially
16 the intervention there, or the way that the office of
17 Deputy Prime Minister stepped in was initially to look
18 at the tendering process to ensure that fire rescue
19 services were entering into the system in a very similar
20 way.

21 I think partially that was to ensure that there was
22 a level of inter-operability, not only within the same
23 service, so fire service to fire service, but with other
24 blue light emergency services.

25 Q. That had the result, did it, of slowing down the process

1 because of the number of forces involved --

2 A. That's quite correct, yes.

3 Q. -- and the amount of -- no doubt, of papers and
4 documents produced?

5 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Why couldn't the Association of Chief
6 Fire Officers have done that kind of job?

7 A. The governing body for fire rescue services within
8 England, Wales and Scotland was the office of Deputy
9 Prime Minister, so the Association of Chief Fire
10 Officers or the Chief Fire Officers' Association,
11 sorry --

12 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Sorry, whichever way --

13 A. -- that's right -- would have answered to them.

14 MR KEITH: Subsequently, was responsibility for the
15 governance of the project transferred to another
16 Government body?

17 A. It was, in 2006, I believe. There was a change in
18 Government department or Government structure so the
19 office of Deputy Prime Minister, the responsibilities
20 that they had for the fire rescue services was taken
21 over by another department there.

22 Q. Was it the Department of Communities and Local
23 Government?

24 A. That's correct, DCLG.

25 Q. Do you recall, in hindsight, whether or not that

1 transfer of responsibility between Government
2 departments slowed down or accelerated the project?
3 A. I wasn't in position then, so I --
4 Q. You don't know?
5 A. I don't really know whether or not it -- it clearly
6 slowed down with the office of Deputy Prime Minister
7 stepping in, for the London Fire Brigade it clearly
8 slowed down our delivery of a new main scheme radio
9 system, but I can't answer as to whether or not the
10 Deputy -- sorry, Department of Local and Community
11 Government actually slowed down the overall project
12 nationally.
13 Q. You've told us that the entire process by which the main
14 scheme radio in the vehicles came to be replaced was
15 complete by February 2010.
16 A. That's correct.
17 Q. But when did the actual practical installation of main
18 scheme radios in London Fire Brigade vehicles start, how
19 long was the physical part of the process?
20 A. It started something like August 2009 with the issue --
21 or the fitment of radios into vehicles. However,
22 shortly after -- sorry, I have to look at my time-line
23 here. In 2006/2007, London Fire Brigade were granted
24 access to, if you want, an early introduction of Airwave
25 terminals. That was given specifically to senior

1 officers or those with specific tasks within the London
2 Fire Brigade.

3 Q. So there was an advance installation or advance handing
4 out of the main scheme radio sets to certain individual
5 members of the Fire Brigade?

6 A. That's correct.

7 Q. But the vehicle installation commenced the year before,
8 2009?

9 A. Yes, yes.

10 Q. Was it worth the wait, Mr A'Court?

11 A. Very much so.

12 Q. Nine years in the conception?

13 A. I can't say whether or not it was worth the wait. I can
14 tell you that the facilities that the radios give us are
15 significantly better than the old analogue radio system.
16 The clarity of speech, the coverage that it provides, is
17 significantly better than we had before.

18 Q. You have also, on behalf of the London Fire Brigade,
19 responded to some of the issues which were identified in
20 writing for you by Mr Smith, Solicitor to the Inquest.

21 Can we have [LFB137-8]?

22 Most of these points you've already addressed in the
23 course of your evidence, but could we just look at one
24 or two of these bullet points?

25 A. Certainly.

1 Q. The first question on that page was:
2 "Whether there were any risks of which London Fire
3 Brigade was aware prior to 7 July ... that might have
4 affected the efficacy of any response to a major or
5 large scale incident?"
6 You make the point that radio communication failure
7 was a risk because of the fact that, at that time, leaky
8 feeder systems only operated down to the platform level.
9 Of course, now they are now extended throughout the
10 tunnel.
11 A. Yes.
12 Q. You make the point that, even then, there was
13 a deployable leaky feeder system, but we know that took
14 some time to be deployed, in fact, at Edgware Road.
15 Can I ask you about a different aspect of the leaky
16 feeder system? It is and remains vulnerable to
17 explosion, does it not?
18 A. Yes, any hardwired system will remain vulnerable to
19 explosion.
20 Q. The Airwave system operated by the other emergency
21 services does not depend on a leaky feeder system
22 although the London Underground system depends to
23 a certain extent on leaky feeders.
24 A. I'm sorry, there's a slight lack of clarity there on
25 what you're saying, because the Airwave system in the

1 London Underground does rely on leaky feeders.

2 Q. Yes, I said the London Underground CONNECT system relies
3 on leaky feeders, but the other emergency services'
4 Airwave system underground relies on base radios, which
5 are not leaky feeders.

6 A. Okay, there's -- again, there's -- part of the extension
7 of CONNECT and the way that it was rolled out with the
8 Airwave system in the London Underground, my
9 understanding is there are also leaky feeder systems
10 within that deployment as well.

11 Q. CONNECT for London Underground. London Underground
12 doesn't have the same system as the London Ambulance
13 Service action British Transport Police, Airwave system,
14 below ground?

15 A. No, it's a different system.

16 Q. Exactly. Was consideration given to whether or not the
17 leaky feeders operated by the London Fire Brigade were
18 sufficiently, and remained sufficiently, robust, or that
19 there are alternative systems in place in the event that
20 a leaky feeder is damaged by a derailment or explosion
21 or whatever it is?

22 A. I think the equipment that we carry on our Command units
23 is part of our fallback system for a failure of
24 communications within any underground or tunnel system.
25 Whether or not it was the -- one of the prime focuses

1 for continuing with an analogue system, I can't answer
2 that. But the deployment of additional equipment was
3 there and considered.

4 Q. If, tomorrow, there were, God forbid, to be a derailment
5 or an explosion in the tunnel that damaged the leaky
6 feeder and the London Fire Brigade handheld radio system
7 could not work because of a lack of a leaky feeder in
8 that section of tunnel, what alternative means would be
9 available to you to allow communication from
10 Fire Brigade staff in the tunnel to Brigade Control or,
11 at the very least, London Fire Brigade vehicle?

12 A. Okay, we've got a number of systems that we can use.
13 Either you can continue using the handheld radios that
14 we deploy, use them on channel 1 so it doesn't require
15 the use of a leaky feeder system.

16 Q. Direct site-to-site?

17 A. That would be site-to-site, probably from a tunnel
18 location, onto the platform, and there is a high
19 likelihood then that we will be able to use a channel 5
20 signal from the platform up to the rendezvous point, so
21 the signal would go out that way.

22 We also have our deployable leaky feeder system --

23 Q. The mobile leaky feeder that can be put into the tunnel?

24 A. Yes.

25 Q. All right. We know that takes a bit of time, for

1 obvious operational reasons, but you are confident that
2 the handheld radio system would still work provided that
3 there are enough handheld radios in the tunnel or the
4 environment so as to be able to bring them within some
5 degree of proximity to each other?

6 A. Yes, made significantly better by the fact that now
7 we've rolled out handheld radios to all operational
8 officers, as I explained earlier.

9 Q. The second bullet point addressed whether or not there
10 were communication difficulties on 7 July. There were
11 some difficulties, were there not, at King's Cross but
12 only because I think some of the radios then in place
13 did not allow communications to go much beyond the
14 platform, if at all, there were some difficulties in
15 getting full communications down to platform level, were
16 there not?

17 A. I've not been made aware of any specifics about the
18 failures, so it's very difficult for me to answer the
19 question. I think that's why I said I couldn't provide
20 a specific answer to that particular question.

21 Q. Could we have [LFB49-32]?

22 This is an extract of key points that were raised
23 internally within the Fire Brigade, and there are only
24 very few, in fact, that deal with communications
25 generally.

1 But at KP, key point, 22:
2 "Handheld radios did not work effectively at
3 King's Cross (from the Piccadilly Line platform to [the]
4 control at the top of [the] escalator and there were
5 also some intermittent problems between control at the
6 top of [the] escalator and outside the station)."
7 It appears, then, that such difficulties as there
8 had been -- and I emphasise there weren't systemic
9 difficulties with the Fire Brigade's communications on
10 the day -- arose out of difficulties with some handheld
11 radios.
12 Do you believe that the current replacement handheld
13 radios are more robust and they worked better, in
14 essence, than the old ones?
15 A. I think they're significantly more robust and worked
16 better.
17 Q. One other point raised by the London Fire Brigade
18 internally -- can we have [LFB159-4] -- was that the main
19 radio became very congested?
20 A. Mm-hmm.
21 Q. The main scheme radio. We can see there under "radio":
22 "LFB main radio net too busy and inappropriate to
23 use for management purposes."
24 Has consideration been given to how users of the
25 main scheme radio may properly be regulated in how they

1 use the main scheme radio?

2 A. The radio and the regulation of the use of radio is
3 fairly strictly controlled anyway, because from any one
4 incident only one person is transmitting back to
5 a mobilising control -- to our mobilising control on any
6 particular talkgroup, as it is now, or any particular
7 channel, as it was then.

8 There haven't been -- there hasn't been a large
9 change to our policy and procedure. With the rollout of
10 Airwave radios, we still use a single talkgroup for
11 a geographic area within London Fire Brigade area.
12 However, what we have done is worked with other
13 agencies to look at issues over capacity, to say in the
14 event of a -- in the event of difficult communications
15 for a large incident, then actually we can deploy and
16 employ various tactics to ensure that we limit the
17 amount of radio traffic that's occurring.

18 Q. So in essence, has the Fire Brigade signed up to the
19 same sort of protocols as the other emergency
20 services -- for example, the standard operating
21 procedures for use of Airwave set out by the -- I think
22 it was the National Policing Improvement Agency, for use
23 of Airwave at incidents?

24 A. We are moving towards something very similar for that.
25 The work that I still do with the other agencies is

1 driving us in the same direction.

2 Q. All right. Then, finally, over the page, [LFB137-9], the
3 second page of this short statement, you were asked
4 whether there were any unresolved problems with Airwave
5 which affect the robustness of the system, and you were
6 confident that in terms of London Fire Brigade usage
7 there were no such issues. There were a few issues
8 regarding capacity, the number of simultaneous users,
9 but that had not, to your knowledge, affected the
10 ability to communicate?

11 A. Not for us, no, that's right.

12 MR KEITH: Thank you very much. Those are all the questions
13 that I have for you, Mr A'Court.

14 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Mr Coltart?

15 Questions by MR COLTART

16 MR COLTART: I just have a handful of questions, if I may.
17 I'd like to see if we can make a little further
18 progress on the topic of handheld radios and improvised
19 explosive devices and the ability of the one to set off
20 the other and what your procedures might be.
21 When we had firefighters here from the Aldgate
22 scene, they told my Lady that they had switched off
23 their radios for fear that there may be a secondary
24 device somewhere within the location.
25 We then heard from an S013 police officer, a bomb

1 disposal expert, called Richard Travers, who was a very
2 laconic type, as one might expect in that type of work
3 that he undertakes, and he gave a different explanation
4 and he said that, "We only switch off our radios once we
5 know that there is a secondary device and it has been
6 located".

7 Now, is there any particular reason why the
8 Fire Brigade and the police would operate a different
9 policy as far as that important issue is concerned?

10 A. The Incident Commander attending any incident will look
11 out for the safety of their own crews. If there is
12 a potential for an IED to become detonated by use of our
13 own equipment, then quite clearly, the
14 Incident Commander is going to limit the use of that
15 equipment.

16 The information that we had at the time, and
17 I believe still have, doesn't clearly state that we
18 should be changing the distances at which we are using
19 our equipment at operational incidents.

20 So at the moment, we still stick to 10 metres for
21 a handheld radio and 50 metres for a main scheme radio,
22 where there is suspicion of a potential explosive
23 device.

24 Q. I think that's where the issue lies. It's not so much
25 in the distances, it's more in the Fire Brigade

1 operating on the basis of suspicion of a secondary
2 device and the Metropolitan Police operating on the
3 basis of knowledge of a secondary device, and they are
4 obviously two very different things, aren't they?

5 A. Yes.

6 Q. We might be assisted if we just have a look at LESLP on
7 this. Could we have [LFB44-29] on the screen, please?

8 If we could enlarge the middle of that page, this
9 was the advice that was in force at the time in 2005,
10 but we've checked it this morning and it appears to be
11 identical to the latest edition of the LESLP manual
12 which is on the internet.

13 Under the heading "Terrorism":

14 "At known or suspected terrorist incidents radios
15 should be kept on. The obvious benefits in being able
16 to communicate at a major incident far outweigh the
17 remote risk of activating a device through radio
18 transmission. Only when an unexploded suspect device
19 has been located, should personnel withdraw to at least
20 10 metres ... before transmitting on personal radios."

21 So it appears as if the policy which the
22 Fire Brigade has in place is at odds with the guidance
23 which appears in the LESLP manual.

24 Now, is there a particular reason for that or is
25 that an anomaly which perhaps ought to be looked into?

1 A. I think it's an anomaly where we're perhaps erring on
2 the side of caution.

3 Q. Because it's important, arguably, isn't it, that all of
4 the emergency services adopt the same procedure as far
5 as this issue is concerned, particularly now that you've
6 got inter-operable radios and you can communicate with
7 each other?

8 A. It's certainly a worthy consideration, yes.

9 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Presumably, the London Fire Brigade
10 would have been involved in the development of the plan
11 because you are one of the emergency services that would
12 have been invited to the table?

13 A. Yes, my Lady, yes, we are.

14 MR COLTART: That's perhaps something that could be looked
15 at.

16 Can we turn then more generally to the issue of
17 communications? We know that as far as handheld radios
18 are concerned, some of the emergency services have
19 undergone very significant transition over the course of
20 the last few years. We've heard from the
21 London Underground Control and Command officers about
22 CONNECT. We've heard about the Metropolitan Police,
23 a vast new integrated project involving Airwave and the
24 rest of it. But your procedures have changed far less,
25 haven't they, as far as handheld radios are concerned?

1 A. They have, yes.

2 Q. You're still on an analogue system which you've upgraded
3 the hardware --

4 A. Yes.

5 Q. -- but it's still the same software involved?

6 A. Essentially, yes.

7 Q. The difference in your capability, in terms of
8 underground communication -- by which I mean in the
9 tunnel, rather than from the surface to the platform
10 level --

11 A. Yes.

12 Q. -- that capability has been enhanced by the extension
13 simply of leaky feeder cable into the tunnels which will
14 get you your radio communications in that area?

15 A. Yes, that's right.

16 Q. Now, to me, someone who's not remotely technical, that
17 of itself doesn't sound as if it was a terribly
18 complicated exercise in order to get you that additional
19 capability within the tunnels themselves.

20 Is that a fair assumption, or is it more complicated
21 than that?

22 A. I think in terms of the actual work that's required,
23 because cables can only be fitted when the trains aren't
24 running, there's a limited amount of time, and we have
25 120-odd miles of underground tunnels to put cables in.

1 So it's not an insignificant undertaking.

2 Q. But it was -- assuming that one can work at night when
3 the trains aren't running, when a lot of the engineering
4 work, of course, is carried out -- possible, wasn't it,
5 in the months and years before July 2005, for that
6 exercise to have been undertaken to lay some additional
7 cable effectively in the tunnels to give you that extra
8 capability?

9 A. Until the 7 July bombings, we hadn't really set --
10 determined that there was a requirement to have
11 significant communications in the tunnel. Because of
12 the additional equipment that we carry, we were able to
13 lay down our own leaky feeder, as it were, from
14 transportable repeaters and leaky feeders to extend the
15 coverage into the tunnel.

16 Q. As we'll see in a moment, that brings with it, though,
17 a timing implication, doesn't it?

18 A. It does.

19 Q. Because that involves getting the Command Unit to the
20 scene of the incident, establishing the technology
21 within the Command Unit so that it's operational and
22 then taking the portable leaky feeder unit and
23 physically getting it into the tunnel?

24 A. That's right.

25 Q. That could have been avoided, presumably, that time

1 delay, if there had already been in place the leaky
2 feeder cable in the tunnels themselves?

3 A. Had it already been there, yes. The onus of providing
4 the equipment and maintaining the equipment to provide
5 London Fire Brigade with channel 5 communications
6 underground, or in the London Underground premises, lays
7 with London Underground.

8 So it wasn't us that undertook to extend the
9 equipment. It was an offer from London Underground
10 within the CONNECT project to extend the equipment,
11 which we gratefully accepted.

12 Q. But it would have been open to you, presumably, at an
13 earlier point in time from that, to suggest to
14 London Underground this is something you ought to be
15 doing in partnership with each other?

16 A. It would have been possible to suggest it, yes.

17 Q. Let's just have a look at the events of the day, and
18 I appreciate that you weren't involved personally but
19 we'll make such progress as we can.

20 Could we just see what capability a Command Unit
21 brings with it, if it we have on screen, please,
22 [LFB44-31]? This is back to the LESLP plan.

23 We see there, don't we, at 8.7.3:

24 "As well as main VHF radio, LFB command vehicles
25 also carry the following communication facilities:

1 "'Matel' field telephones", which we've heard quite
2 a lot about over the course of the last few weeks,
3 "which are compatible with those in the other emergency
4 service control vehicles."

5 It provides a means, does it not, of the emergency
6 services communicating directly with each other at the
7 site of a major incident?

8 A. It can do, yes.

9 Q. "These are available for use at major incidents for
10 liaison purposes and for establishing communications
11 with control vehicles."

12 Then, as we've seen:

13 "A mobile leaky feed cable capable of being laid
14 into areas of bad ... reception.

15 "Cell phones ...

16 "Cellular faxes; and

17 "Downlink image receivers" for use with
18 a helicopter?

19 A. That's right.

20 Q. And:

21 "All command vehicles are equipped with computers
22 and are staffed by personnel trained in the use of the
23 command planning system software."

24 So it's a pretty sophisticated piece of kit?

25 A. It is.

1 Q. Let's see, before we go further, what in fact happened
2 to the Command Unit in relation to King's Cross, because
3 that's where, arguably, it might have been of greatest
4 assistance, that presented the most significant
5 technological difficulties on the day because of the
6 depth of the tunnel.

7 A. Okay.

8 Q. Ms Boyd and I have spent some time and deployed some
9 detective work this morning trying to work out what
10 happened with the Command Unit at King's Cross, but the
11 best that we can do is it arrived some time at about
12 10.00 that morning at King's Cross. The reason for that
13 was that it was part of the wave of fire engines which
14 got sent to Euston Underground station first rather than
15 to King's Cross.

16 But there's a suggestion, if we look at [LFB51-7],
17 please, that a deliberate decision was taken not to make
18 use of the leaky feeder cable. If we highlight, please,
19 or enlarge the bottom half of that page and look at
20 paragraph 41 -- or paragraph 40, I should say first,
21 this was an observation in italics that was made by the
22 London Assembly review:

23 "Communications from the trains to the London
24 Underground Network Control Centre and the emergency
25 services were inadequate or non-existent ... As

1 a result, transport and emergency service workers had to
2 run from the train to the platforms and back again ..."
3 We've heard plenty of evidence about that.
4 Then this is the Fire Brigade response to that
5 observation:
6 "... personnel are able to communicate with each
7 other from platform to surface level. Between the
8 platform and the train it is possible to continue the
9 functionality of handheld radios through the utilisation
10 of UHF repeaters."
11 This is the leaky feeder system, isn't it?
12 A. That's right.
13 Q. "They are carried on each of the Brigade's [fire]
14 Command Units."
15 "Five Command Units", is that?
16 "We therefore have the capability to do this at five
17 separate sites. A sound operational decision was taken
18 by the Incident Commanders that the communication
19 arrangements were sufficient to respond to the incident.
20 The use of people conveying information from the
21 platform to the train is an operationally safe and
22 effective method of communication and this was used [LFB51-8]
23 effectively on the day."
24 To us, I have to confess that sounds like quite an
25 odd contention. Would you ever, if you had the

1 capability to set up a leaky feeder to provide you with
2 radio capability within a tunnel, choose instead to have
3 runners going up and down what was a very significant
4 distance at King's Cross?

5 A. It really does depend on the scenario and what people
6 are being faced with. I mean, my understanding of the
7 incidents -- all of the incidents that we attended was
8 that there was a significant amount of confusion, there
9 was a significant amount of activity going on between
10 all of the emergency services, and so, to then choose to
11 deploy equipment that may well have been able to support
12 some form of communications rather than to use what
13 effectively you're saying is runners is one that you
14 can't actually -- with hindsight, you can probably say
15 "Actually, it would have been good to have deployed the
16 leaky feeder", but at the time it would have been a very
17 difficult decision.

18 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Mr Coltart, can you remind me, did we
19 have a witness who said they took this sound operational
20 decision?

21 MR COLTART: We didn't. Mr Adams came and gave some
22 evidence about the communication issues at King's Cross,
23 and perhaps if we were to have a look at his witness
24 statement or his debrief report, I think we might obtain
25 some guidance from this, because it rather looks as if

1 he might have found it helpful at an earlier stage, if
2 we look at [INQ8806-3].

3 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: I'm not following at the moment,
4 Mr A'Court, why it would be a difficult decision?
5 What's the downside of getting the leaky feeder system
6 in place?

7 A. The -- it's the times to deploy, which has already been
8 recognised, my Lady.

9 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: You use the runners in the meantime.

10 A. And you can use the runners in the meantime. But also,
11 the fact that you're laying loose cable across the path
12 where you may well want to work, so essentially you're
13 putting in a trip hazard, especially when you're trying
14 to carry a large number of people out from the incident
15 site.

16 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Right.

17 MR COLTART: If we look at [INQ8806-3] and enlarge the top
18 half of that page, this is -- Mr Adams became, as you
19 probably know, the Incident Commander at King's Cross,
20 and he says:

21 "Once the Command Unit arrived, we set about
22 improving communications by using:

23 "Channel 5 (leaky feeder) below ground."

24 So it looks as if it was deployed.

25 "'Matel' hard line communications between the three

1 sectors was established."

2 We recall that the Fire Brigade split the
3 King's Cross incident into three separate sectors.

4 A. Mm-hmm.

5 Q. And he used the control planning system, the computer
6 system, for contact between Gold control at RMC.

7 So it doesn't -- it's not obvious as to Mr Adams
8 making any operational decision that it was better to
9 use runners. It appears on the face of it, does it not,
10 that he was assisted by the Command Unit, once it had
11 arrived, albeit it was delayed having gone via Euston?

12 A. I'm not really sure at what time Mr Adams turned up to
13 the incident, so what the time-line of this is, because
14 it may well be he's a senior divisional officer, he
15 would have been slightly later at the incident.

16 Q. Mr Adams arrived at about 10.00, I think, and I'll be
17 corrected by Ms Boyd if I have that wrong. Yes, we
18 think that's right, about 10.00 he arrived. So we think
19 about the same time as the Command Unit.

20 It may be -- and in fairness to you I was going to
21 ask you to comment on an entry in the MOBIS report
22 anyway.

23 If we could have [LFB11-9], please, and the top half
24 of that page, do you see the entry at 10.25.54:

25 "020E", that was the call sign for the Command Unit

1 which attended King's Cross?
2 A. Yes.
3 Q. "Incoming message. Request attendance of brigade radio
4 officer."
5 What would that indicate?
6 A. What would it indicate? There were some issues at the
7 site and they wanted the advice of someone with the
8 technical understanding of how to improve radio
9 communications.
10 Q. The staff who were on the Command Unit, who would have
11 crewed that unit, they wouldn't have needed that sort of
12 assistance, though, to set up a leaky feeder, would
13 they?
14 A. Not to set up a leaky feeder system, but if there were
15 other issues then --
16 Q. They might need some expert input?
17 A. Yes, some additional advice.
18 Q. We can see the next entry at 10.32, from Mr Adams, he --
19 "makes pumps 12" is the message that he sent out.
20 That's being sent, it appears, from the Command Unit.
21 So it's certainly operational at 10.30 at the very
22 latest.
23 But in any event, is the position this, you can't
24 help us one way or another with whether that was a sound
25 operational decision or --

1 A. With the decisions that were made at the time, no, it's
2 very difficult for me to judge, because I wasn't
3 actually at the scene.

4 Q. But there was an observation made, if we have a look
5 also, please, at LFB62 [LFB62-1]. This is the report, this is the
6 debrief report for the Islington crews who attended at
7 King's Cross. If we go through to page 3 [LFB62-3], please, the
8 bottom half of that page, if we just go up the page
9 a little, do you see:

10 "The perception by some was that the Command Unit
11 took a relatively long time to become operational which
12 resulted in the ICP ..."

13 Is that the Incident Command pump?

14 A. That's correct, yes.

15 Q. "... being required to deal with more resources and the
16 complexity of a dynamic incident for longer than
17 normal."

18 So if one takes that observation in conjunction with
19 Mr Adams' observation that communications improved once
20 the Command Unit was operational, is it the fact that it
21 was really the delayed arrival of the Command Unit which
22 was causing the difficulties, perhaps, rather than
23 a deliberate decision being made not to use it?

24 A. It's certainly a possibility that that's true. Again,
25 it's very hard to say that the delayed arrival or the

1 delayed use of the Command Unit would actually have
2 caused the delay in any communications systems. It's
3 not reasonable to assume from what's said there that
4 that was the case.

5 Q. But it is reasonable to assume that in an ideal world,
6 of course, the Command Unit would be sent to the scene
7 of a major incident as soon as possible because that's
8 the very purpose that it's designed to serve?

9 A. Yes, that's correct.

10 Q. Yes. One last short issue, please, if we may, which
11 relates to the setup of Gold control on the day because
12 I'm hoping you can just shed some light on a particular
13 issue.

14 If we look at [LFB49-22], this, again, is one of the
15 LFB debrief documents.

16 This deals with how your Gold control was set up on
17 7 July. The Resource Management Centre, it makes
18 reference to, was formally established in June 2005 and
19 brought together the role of three satellite offices,
20 the Gold control room and the fallback site for
21 Brigade Control.

22 Now, the RMC as it was known, I think, was that in
23 Stratford?

24 A. That's correct, yes.

25 Q. We can see that if we go to paragraph numbered 60:

1 "The senior divisional officer who has
2 responsibility for Brigade Control and the RMC was
3 alerted to the bomb incidents by pager ... After
4 informing the Deputy Commissioner ... of the situation,
5 he contacted RMC and instructed them to 'hot up' the
6 Gold control room."

7 So it was envisaged, I think, by that, that RMC
8 Stratford was to be the sort of operational hub, is that
9 right?

10 A. That's fair, yes.

11 Q. Then, as we can see at paragraph 62:

12 "The role of Gold control is to take a strategic
13 overview of the Brigade's response to large incidents"
14 and so on and so forth.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. As one would expect. Now, we've heard in relation to
17 the London Ambulance Service over the last 24 hours that
18 they had had difficulties, IT difficulties, in getting
19 the Gold control room up and running, and if we go over
20 the page [LFB49-23], and again, please, to page 24 [LFB49-24], under the
21 heading "Information Technology":

22 "Extra IT support was provided on the day, both at
23 the Resource Management Centre [in Stratford] and on the
24 7th floor at Brigade Headquarters."

25 And:

1 "Following TV broadcast of the incidents, the duty
2 bridge engineer contacted Gold control and asked if any
3 IT assistance was required. Support was required and to
4 ensure his prompt arrival, given the problems with
5 public transport, a car was sent to collect him and he
6 arrived at approximately 12.10."

7 So I'm sure he was got there as quickly as was
8 possible, but that, of course, was considerably after
9 all the scenes had been evacuated, wasn't it?

10 A. That's right.

11 Q. Then set out over the course of the next few
12 paragraphs -- we probably don't need to explore it in
13 detail unless anyone wants to -- it sets out all the
14 various measures which he took either at Stratford or at
15 Brigade Control once he had arrived, in terms of
16 plugging in phone lines and getting video conferencing
17 set up and all the rest of it, but can I ask: why hadn't
18 this been done before, such that the Gold control room
19 was fully operational and ready for an emergency of this
20 type?

21 A. I can't answer that, I don't know why it wasn't done
22 earlier than that.

23 MS BOYD: My Lady, I wonder if I could interrupt at this
24 stage? I hesitate, I was about to jump to my feet
25 a moment ago, because I'm not sure this is the right

1 witness to deal with these kinds of questions.
2 Assistant Commissioner Reason is doing -- handling the
3 generic issues, and this I think really falls outside
4 the strict communications. As you can see from this
5 witness's statements, they've been solely to deal with
6 handheld radios, the main scheme radio, and I think this
7 is probably putting this witness into difficulties
8 because it's beyond his remit.

9 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: We're moving to Gold control now,
10 Mr Coltart, so I think Ms Boyd makes a fair point.

11 MR COLTART: I'm perfectly happy to be guided by Ms Boyd by
12 that. I bracketed this into a general sort of
13 technological basket, but if Mr A'Court isn't the right
14 witness to answer the questions, then of course I won't
15 pursue it further through him, in which case I don't
16 think I have anything else to ask you about, and thank
17 you very much.

18 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Thank you. Any other questions for
19 Mr A'Court? Ms Boyd?

20 Questions by MS BOYD

21 MS BOYD: Thank you very much.

22 Mr A'Court, as my Lady observed a moment ago,
23 I think it was before the luncheon adjournment, it's the
24 frequency of any radio that may detonate an IED, and
25 that should be distinguished between the difference

1 between intrinsically safe radios and non-intrinsically
2 safe radios. They are two separate issues?
3 A. Very different issues, yes. The intrinsic safety means
4 that the equipment in itself operates in a safe way so
5 that it doesn't cause a spark and doesn't ignite any
6 flammable vapours or gases or, if it were to fail, it
7 fails in such a way again that it wouldn't ignite any
8 flammable gases, whereas the potential of a device, any
9 device, to detonate an IED is -- occurs through the
10 transmissions that come from that device.
11 Q. Whether or not it's intrinsically safe?
12 A. Whether or not it's intrinsically safe.
13 Q. But the distinction for the London Fire Brigade between
14 intrinsically safe and non-intrinsically safe is
15 particularly important because BA wearers are likely to
16 be in the presence of flammable gases?
17 A. That's correct, yes. Breathing apparatus wearers will
18 typically go into compartments where the gases have not
19 yet ignited, so there's a potential for an explosion to
20 be caused.
21 Q. Hence it's their radios that are intrinsically safe?
22 A. That's correct.
23 Q. As I think you've said, that's one of the factors that
24 was behind the decision to keep an analogue system for
25 handheld radios, because there was a lack of

1 intrinsically safe digital radios --

2 A. That's right.

3 Q. -- compatible with BA handsets?

4 A. Yes, that's right.

5 Q. BA headsets, I should say.

6 A. BA headsets, yes.

7 Q. I think if we look at your statement, LFB173,

8 paragraph 13 [LFB173-3], you set out there, which Mr Keith has

9 already asked you questions about, the other factors

10 which influence the decision to keep analogue -- the

11 analogue system.

12 A. Yes.

13 Q. You were asked about the difference in distribution of

14 handheld radios post-July 7.

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. I think you said in your evidence that the numbers were

17 increased, not only was the radio upgraded and replaced

18 by an Entel radio, but the numbers were increased so

19 that every single operational firefighter now has

20 a radio?

21 A. That's correct. The numbers changed from approximately

22 400 radios throughout the whole of the London Fire

23 Brigade to around 5,000.

24 Q. In addition to that, I think, prior to 7/7, there was

25 only one radio fixed to a BA set?

1 A. Yes, and that's increased to two now.

2 Q. Thank you. Was that partly influenced by an incident
3 where two firefighters tragically lost their lives?

4 A. Yes, yes, it was.

5 Q. Can I deal now briefly with the -- you were asked the
6 extent of the communication difficulties at
7 King's Cross.

8 A. That's right.

9 Q. Mr Coltart was asking you questions about the deployment
10 of the leaky feeder, whether it was deployed or the
11 decision not to deploy it. I think the evidence from
12 the firefighters at King's Cross has been mixed. We
13 know that Newton, for instance, Firefighter Newton,
14 experienced considerable difficulty using his radio.

15 A. Mm-hmm.

16 Q. Therefore, he went up the escalators to communicate with
17 Mr Roche. Divisional Officer Cowup, however, gave
18 evidence to the inquest to the effect that he had no
19 communication difficulties, and those communicating from
20 the platform to him up on the surface had no difficulty
21 at all. So clearly communications were mixed.

22 It's true, however, that there were no
23 communications at that stage going into the tunnel?

24 A. That's right.

25 Q. The leaky feeder hadn't been extended. In terms of

1 extending the leaky feeder, you explained how that
2 decision really lies with London Underground because
3 it's their infrastructure?

4 A. The fixed leaky feeder system, yes.

5 Q. You can suggest what you like, but obviously you'd have
6 to have London Underground to give the say-so to carry
7 out that work?

8 A. That's right.

9 Q. As you understand it, were they in the process of
10 rolling out the CONNECT programme?

11 A. Yes, they were.

12 Q. So, therefore, was the speed at which the leaky feeder
13 was laid out or installed, was that dictated by the
14 CONNECT programme effectively?

15 A. It was wholly dictated by them and the programme of
16 installation for the cabling that they were going to fit
17 for CONNECT, yes.

18 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: After -- before your time, but after
19 the King's Cross fire investigation, the Fire Brigade
20 must have been at the heart of that investigation.

21 A. Yes, my Lady.

22 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: We all know the recommendations that
23 were made about communications.

24 A. Yes.

25 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: I would have assumed that, given the

1 recommendations of Sir Desmond Fennell, or I think
2 Desmond Fennell as he was at the time, a great deal of
3 discussions would have gone on between the various
4 organisations saying, "How can we improve
5 communications?"

6 A. And at that point, the communications, my Lady, were
7 significantly improved to -- and that's the driver to
8 provide a channel 5 system from the rendezvous point on
9 the surface of any section 12 Underground station to the
10 platform level.

11 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: But Fennell doesn't seem to have been
12 the driver to getting leaky feeders extended throughout
13 the tunnels before 7/7.

14 A. No.

15 MR KEITH: My Lady might be assisted. The only reference in
16 Lextranet to the particular recommendation from Fennell
17 in relation to the Fire Brigade can be seen in the
18 course of Chief Inspector Short's Operation Pendulum
19 report, which is BTP48-1 [BTP428-1].

20 Recommendation 111, paragraph 2.1, the radio
21 equipment at Underground stations for British Transport
22 Police must be made compatible with that used by the
23 London Fire Brigade. I'm sorry, I haven't got the page
24 number on the screen. It's --

25 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: I wasn't thinking just so much of

1 recommendations relating directly to the London Fire
2 Brigade. I was thinking about recommendations and
3 comments about communications generally.

4 MR KEITH: Yes, and the heart of it was a compatibility
5 recommendation.

6 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Sorry I interrupted, Ms Boyd.

7 MS BOYD: Not at all, my Lady.

8 There were essentially two issues that came out of
9 the Fennell Report, I think. Firstly, that
10 communications should go below ground down to the
11 platform?

12 A. Yes, that's right.

13 Q. That was effectively achieved by the leaky feeder
14 system?

15 A. Yes.

16 Q. Therefore, that recommendation was complied with
17 immediately following the report?

18 A. Yes.

19 Q. It may be that no further thought was actually given to
20 extending it into the tunnel. With the benefit of
21 hindsight, 7/7, one might have done, but at that
22 stage --

23 A. With the benefit of hindsight, that's true.

24 Q. -- the financial report was recommending communications
25 sub-surface down to platform level?

1 A. Yes.

2 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Thank you, Ms Boyd. I think I had
3 misremembered.

4 MS BOYD: As far as compatibility is concerned, perhaps we
5 can just deal with that, although I think it was dealt
6 with by Mr Gibbs in questions of Mr Short, that in terms
7 of compatibility, I think there was a working party set
8 up to look at the issue of compatibility between the
9 London Fire Brigade and BTP in the light of the
10 recommendation, and it was concluded that it was neither
11 required nor desirable, and that inter-operability at
12 operational level was best achieved face-to-face.

13 A. That's correct.

14 Q. I think the reference to that is the same reference,
15 BTP428-4.

16 Effectively, that remains the same, does it not, in
17 terms of, at operational level, you want the chain of
18 command going up the organisation, up to tactical level,
19 Silver 2, but you want your own chain of command?

20 A. Yes, we want to maintain the chain of command and we
21 want operational personnel to be able to talk to each
22 other. Usually, what occurs at an incident where
23 there's multi-agency attendance is that the -- the
24 Silver Commanders or the tactical officers will talk to
25 each other face-to-face.

1 Q. Just before we leave the leaky feeder and sub-surface,
2 you were asked some questions about its robustness and
3 resilience --
4 A. Mm-hmm.
5 Q. -- and that it might be susceptible to being blown up if
6 there was a bomb.
7 A. Yes.
8 Q. I think you were trying to say that actually Airwave
9 similarly would be vulnerable?
10 A. It is vulnerable as well to bomb blast, yes.
11 Q. Because they also depend on cables, base stations --
12 A. And base stations, that's right.
13 Q. -- and cables?
14 A. Yes.
15 Q. So if the cable is damaged, in the same way as a leaky
16 feeder, it's damaged?
17 A. It's damaged, that's correct.
18 Q. There seems to be some debate about that. Perhaps
19 Mr Keith can ask some questions.
20 MR KEITH: My technical expertise is happily not in question
21 here, but I do seem to recall that Airwave, which of
22 course works above and below ground, depends on the
23 placement of base radio stations. The
24 London Underground TETRA-based digital variant CONNECT
25 requires both base radios and cabling?

1 A. And cabling, yes.

2 MR KEITH: So the first of those two systems, the Airwave
3 system operated by London Ambulance Service, British
4 Transport Police and the other emergency services below
5 ground, doesn't, in fact, require cabling in the tunnel.

6 MS BOYD: Perhaps the witness could add his expertise to
7 this.

8 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: No, we have somebody else who's going
9 to have a go. Yes, Ms Canby?

10 MS CANBY: Just one small correction to what Mr Keith has
11 said. The Airwave system underground essentially
12 piggy-backs on to the CONNECT system that is
13 underground. So my understanding is that both the
14 CONNECT and Airwave underground system rely on both
15 cabling and base stations. But there is more
16 resilience -- to use the dreaded word -- on both Airwave
17 and CONNECT underground, even though they are reliant on
18 leaky feeders, because of the positioning of the two
19 base stations.

20 So even if there is cabling damaged in the explosion
21 and one base station, you may recall from Mr Collins'
22 evidence that the second base station still covers the
23 tunnel, and so there is, in fact, more resilience built
24 into the CONNECT and Airwave system underground than
25 just the use of an analogue leaky feeder system.

1 MR KEITH: I stand corrected and very impressed.

2 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: I don't suppose, as the witness who's
3 meant to be giving evidence on these technical matters,
4 you are going to comment?

5 A. I'm not going to change that at all, thank you very
6 much.

7 MS BOYD: Can we take it, however, that there are,
8 effectively, underground -- I was going to say three
9 systems, although two systems are linked because of the
10 piggy-backing -- but effectively, three systems
11 underground so that, should one fail, there are two
12 backups?

13 A. There are two backups, although the access that the
14 Fire Brigade would have would only be to one of those
15 backup systems directly, which would be Airwave and the
16 London Underground.

17 Q. But in the sense that, if you're underground, there are
18 three different systems of radios up to the surface?

19 A. Yes, that's correct.

20 Q. Even if your own, for one reason or another, breaks down
21 or the cable has broken or is damaged, there are other
22 personnel in there with their own radios?

23 A. There are two alternative routes to getting a radio
24 message from the tunnel to the rendezvous point, yes.

25 Q. Can I move now to a different topic? You were asked

1 about switching radios off where there may be an IED --

2 A. Yes.

3 Q. -- and the policy regarding that, and in particular the

4 evidence given by the London Fire Brigade. I think

5 Mr Coltart was referring to the evidence of DO Rigby at

6 Aldgate who gave the instruction for radios to be

7 switched off. He also gave evidence that because of the

8 layout of Aldgate, it was very easy to rely on runners.

9 The train was effectively very close to the station and

10 it was his individual risk assessment which he

11 considered it would be safer for radios to be switched

12 off.

13 Is that your understanding?

14 A. That's right, that's my understanding.

15 Q. Indeed, I think there was evidence at Tavistock Square

16 of a Metropolitan Police inspector who admonished the

17 first police officer on the scene who was depicted in

18 some pictures on his radio and he was effectively told

19 off for having his radio on in the presence of what

20 might have been a secondary device on the bus.

21 So does it come down to this, that there has to be

22 a risk assessment at each individual incident?

23 A. For any tactics deployed, yes, there does have to be.

24 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: But at Tavistock Square there had

25 been located the, query, secondary device. So it would

1 have fitted in with the LESLP policy, wouldn't it?

2 MS BOYD: My Lady, I'm not sure it had been located at that
3 stage.

4 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Oh, right.

5 MS BOYD: My recollection of the evidence was that that
6 police officer was on the scene very early and the very
7 next inspector on the scene effectively told him to
8 switch his radio off.

9 My Lady, I may be -- my recollection may be at
10 fault.

11 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: The timings are all confused anyway,
12 but I take your point.

13 Anyway, there seems to be a policy which, by the
14 sounds of it, not everybody is using consistently and it
15 looks like, as Mr A'Court accepted a little earlier, it
16 might be worth looking at -- I'm not suggesting it made
17 any particular difference on the day -- but it may well
18 be worth looking because it could make a difference on
19 another occasion.

20 MS BOYD: My Lady, yes.

21 Yes, thank you very much.

22 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Thank you very much, Mr A'Court.

23 Those are all the questions that we have for you.

24 A. Thank you, my Lady.

25 MR KEITH: My Lady, that concludes the evidence for today.

1 Tomorrow we have Mr Payton scheduled to give
2 evidence as well as Dr Moore. It may be we will start
3 Mr Gary Reason as well, but his evidence may go into
4 Thursday when we will then conclude with Mr McKenna.

5 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Is Dr Moore's statement meant to be
6 in my bundle?

7 MR KEITH: My Lady, the single, very long statement was
8 provided for both Dr Moore and --

9 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Oh, and Dr Davies?

10 MR KEITH: -- Mr Killens, and, as you heard Mr Killens say,
11 Dr Moore will address those parts of the combined
12 statement that deal with triage and the medical issues
13 and equipment.

14 LADY JUSTICE HALLETT: Thank you very much.

15 (3.08 pm)

16 (The inquests adjourned until 10.00 am the following day)

17

18