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Report of the 7 July Review Committee

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen. May I ask that you forgive me for barging into your conference at such short notice.

Let me assure you the fault was not mine.

Resilience and business continuity are not topics that rely solely upon major incidents or catastrophic events.

They are issues that should live with us and be in our thoughts twenty- four hours a day, seven days a week, three hundred and sixty five days a year. Not even leap year presents a day's holiday.

We all have multiple responsibilities to fulfil, to our customers, to our staff and to the continuation of our businesses — no matter how large or how small.

One of the unsung issues of 9/11 was the way in which, within hours and thanks to technology the city of London stepped in and acted for companies in New York that were wiped out. The business centre of America switched its centre of activities across the world to London and the impact of the tragedy was reduced accordingly.

We are all dependent upon communications and we all take it for granted, often to the extent that we perhaps fail to plan for its absence.

Each one of us knows what it is like when we forget to put a watch on in the morning. It is only then that we realise how often we look at our wrists.

The events of 7 July brought home to us all in London how reliant we were on modern means of technology and some surprised us.

The massive increase in hits on the web sites of the Fire Service, The Metropolitan Police service and the London Ambulance Service — up in the millions — brought home the insatiable need that the public have for information and advice, and there is a difference between the two.

My brother was travelling down from York to London on the 7th July and the train stopped, unscheduled in St. Ives. The driver apologised and said that because of an incident in London they were waiting for further instructions. My brother rang me on his mobile to ask what was going on and virtually every one else got out their lap top and logged on to the website of their choice.

They were instantly in touch and when the driver informed them some two hours later that the train was returning to Peterborough and then to York they were better informed than he was.

They were better informed than drivers on the M6, M4 and M3 who had a message flash on those electronic signs that said “London Closed”. A not totally accurate piece of information — but it was electronic and it was instant and it was done.

I do not wish to rehearse the immediate failings of the day, they have been widely publicised and I assume that you are well aware of them, though I will high light some of the issues that we face in London where communication must improve as an imperative.

Tim O’Toole of London Underground said in evidence that driver communication to the line controllers and passengers was antiquated and intermittent. A danger - even on a normal day.

For the rescue workers in the deep tunnels there was no communications either from the trains to the platform, from the platform to ground level or on the tubes from driver to passengers. Needless to say there was no mobile phone, blackberry or other means of receiving or sending information. Or calling for help — there were remarkably few 999 calls on 7th July.

The most 999 calls the services have received on one incident, I am told, was when a swan was on the Kingston by Pass. It started with “There is a swan on the by Pass and ended 112 calls later “Can someone remove the carcass of the swan on the By Pass. On 7th July the calls were in the low double figures.

For the rescuers themselves the problems were compounded. They were going into a known place of danger, possibly with secondary explosions, with an unknown quality of bomb and certainly an unknown number of fatally injured, severely injured and shocked.

With the dust the smoke and the debris and few lights they were virtually blind and with no communications silent.

Their courage is beyond measure and beyond praise.

Below ground they could not communicate to each other and at ground level they were dependent upon the functioning of their radios and mobile phones.

The services have already acknowledged that their was an over reliance upon mobile phones and have taken steps to correct this issue. The Fire Service has invested in satellite systems for senior management and the Ambulance Service in pager systems.

Their sped of action is to be commended.

This over reliance was exacerbated by what seemed like the whole nation ringing each other to determine the safety of loved ones. And the system was tested to breaking point — though some are convinced that it went beyond that point.

Cable and Wireless told us that that normally switch 30,000 calls each 15 minutes from mobile to land line. That number jumped to 300,000 in the same period. BT experienced a massive increase in calls, as did other suppliers.

The difficulty in getting through affect the Fire Service, Ambulance Service, Patient Transport Unit and to a lesser extent the police. In the City the Police called for a declaration of access overload and for a kilometre around Aldgate 02 closed the system to the public. As I am sure you are aware with Accol enabled phones, the right SIM card, this will not disadvantage the emergency services. The problem was no one had an up to date list of who had the right card or was in a position to tell them to switch.

Without prior advice to all the emergency services such a decision could well have added to the problems not resolved them.

Communication on the transport network needs modernising and the system needs to be made safer for all who travel. Inter-operability of emergency services digital radios must be achieved and slippage or delay cannot be contemplated in this dangerous world. We owe it to the travelling public themselves but also to those who risk their lives to save others.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must also communicate with those who are not immediately impacted by the incident. The schools, businesses, and all those involved in the myriad of activities that make any city what it is.

Businesses need to know what to tell their employees — stay here or go home. Walk or catch a bus. Your children will be kept in school. Advice.

They will laso have an insatiable demand to know what has happened. Information.

It is achieving the balance between those two issues that is the challenge of business continuity. How do you do it and how do you condition I train people into knowing what to do and expect.

Ladies and gentlemen I am no techie. My mobile is as old as the hills but it works for me.

The lessons learnt from 7th July are numerous and we must not be afraid to either identify them or admit that they existed. A defensive reversion to type will explain why little has happened since the Kings Cross fire. We cannot let that happen again.

But we must also recognise the challenges.

9/11 was different from 7th July in that on that fateful day there were mass casualties and relatively few survivors. The 7th July had relatively few deaths, tragic as they were, but mass survival. We must learn to plan for that.

We must learn to have in place a Casualty Bureau that can handle over 44,000 calls an hour and be able to lay the calls off to other national centres through CASWEB — and it must be integrated and it must work, the bookies can do it, so can we.

We must be prepared to invest in our people and trust them. To invest in technology and not trust it.

We must ensure that we put people before processes and individuals before incidents.

We must apply our own imagination to meet the needs of the people not the service. Ask what would I need if a loved one of mine was involved or I thought they might be in danger.

The challenge is enormous but I am convinced that we can do it. July 7th showed London at its humane best. We must show the world that we are at our technological best.

Thank you.