Hooligans, gangsters, scoundrels, thugs, thieves, traffic violators and other miscreants in the picturesque Italian town of Pero have all been dealt a severe blow thanks to the introduction of an advanced new monitoring system called VideoPatrol, which allows the police to access live streaming video of crime hotspots while on the move.

The urban security system, jointly designed by 3 Italy and AP Systems (APS), is another example of the innovative developments being brought about by UMTS (3G) technology.

Situated in the province of Milan, Pero could hardly be described as a haven for criminals. In fact, it’s a law-abiding town in which there is only one cop for every 3,000 inhabitants. Nevertheless the local police force had been under pressure to satisfy the dual requirements of manning the police headquarters as well as providing a visible presence to the public.

Launched in April, VideoPatrol came about when the Pero Police Department approached APS, a systems integrator company, to help find a way to alleviate their staff-shortage difficulties. The problem was that the video monitoring centre at police HQ had to be manned at all times, effectively handcuffing valuable officers to their desks.

Realising that the solution lay in mobility, APS in turn approached 3 Italy to help design and implement a system that would deliver real-time video information in a mobile environment. APS was already a partner of 3 Italy, involved in the mobile video company’s 3 for Business programme, which provides innovative communications solutions for professionals on the move.

“We have only ten policemen in a city of 30,000,” says Renato Forte, head of the Pero Police. “We had difficulties in managing this city with such a small force and we needed to improve efficiency because Pero will host the Milan Fair [Europe’s biggest trade fair] in 2005. With VideoPatrol, no one has to stay in
the office and every policeman can be in the field.”

The solution came in the form of a touch screen monitor linked to a rugged Windows 2000 PC and powered by a Fast Mobile Card (Pcmcia).

The devices can be installed on the dashboard of the passenger side of patrol vehicles and are linked to head office via 3 Italy’s UMTS network.

Every patrol consists of two policemen, one driving, the second keeping an eye on the monitor.

With a simple touch of the monitor the PC starts up and, in a few seconds, the monitor starts showing real-time video images provided by a network of cameras at special hotspots around the city, such as high-traffic junctions, central pedestrian areas, parks and schools. The cameras are linked to a streaming server, which in turn is linked to VideoPatrol. When VideoPatrol is on, a policeman can choose between different cameras and manipulate the received images for better viewing. The operator can zoom in, control the camera movements (up, down, right, left), improve the quality of the image, create a still image and even print it in the car.

When alerted by unusual movements, the patrol can make an immediate decision and quickly decide to go to the spot to intervene.

What’s more, a keyboard and printer allow this integrated system to access the city database, making it possible to, for example, verify building permits, identify the immigration status of an individual and access whatever information is available on the data banks.

Wrongdoers who think they can operate under cover of darkness are also in for an unpleasant surprise. The cameras are equipped with advanced technology first developed by the military that allows the cameras to “see” at night.

To keep the system secure from unscrupulous hackers, it is recommended that customers develop VideoPatrol over an “InAzienda” secure Data VPN Solution (Cisco Ipsec). In this way, no one but authorised personnel can access the information.

Pero is the first city in Italy to deploy the system, but other cities will soon follow. In time, it is expected that VideoPatrol will become a standard tool in law enforcement across Italy and beyond.

Not only is VideoPatrol a godsend for the police, but the new service also represents a great business opportunity for APS and 3 Italy with the potential to become a significant new revenue source. There are thousands of police patrol cars in Italy and APS is committed to selling at least 5,000 VideoPatrol units by 2005.

“VideoPatrol service has helped us demonstrate the real business usage potential of a 3G network,” says Ezio Peri, Sales Business Director of 3 Italy.