THE NSW Police force is testing handheld devices, including RIM BlackBerries, and will introduce the next generation of its mobile data terminals next year as part of a strategy to maximise police officers' time on the beat. The new terminals may allow police to scan fingerprints in the field and receive confirmation, across a wireless network, of a suspect's identity.

The touchscreen terminals will give officers access to the computerised operational policing system database, offender details and NSW Roads and Traffic Authority databases.

NSW Police chief information officer Tony Rooke said the devices would be ruggedised notebooks, similar to the present batch in the field.

The organisation would go to tender for the PCs early next year, he said.

"The 1000 will give us coverage in all of our highway patrol vehicles and some of our first-response vehicles, and it will be the first time we will be able to put MDTs out in the country regions," he said. "Until a short while ago the terminals only worked reliably in the Sydney metropolitan area."

The devices use Telstra's MobileData Network, supplemented by global satellite mapping technology.

Problems with network coverage were well known to police when the network was chosen, according to briefing material from Mobile Data Service.

"The decision to go ahead was based on the promotion of the MDS as a secondary communication tool and assurances from Telstra that the network coverage would improve over time," the document says.

As part of its mobile networking initiative, the police force was testing a selection of personal digital assistant devices, including BlackBerries, he said. Officers were mainly using such devices to access email and diaries.

The police force is also introducing a new roster system from Kronos.

"It's a much more powerful roster system than we have at the moment, which is just a collection of access databases across the state," he said.

The new system will be enterprise-wide and can be configured to suit the needs of specialist units.

The system will upload to the NSW Police SAP human resources and finance environment, which will be upgraded early next year.

"The Government has made a commitment to do a technology refresh across the board because it is aware the key to good policing is the right information at the right place and right time," Mr Rooke said.
The police force is also in the middle of an estimated $250 million revamp of its computerised incident dispatch system and computerised operational policing system framework.7

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