The GPS system was conceived in the 1970s but was not fully operational (a minimum constellation of 24 satellites) until 1995. Receivers were close to five-times as expensive to operate in the early days as now.

The cost of small-screen technology, such as light-emitting diode (LED) screens, came down due to the proliferation of mobile phone technology in the 1990s, and mapping data becoming cheaper or free in the case of Google Maps and Google Earth.

It was not until these technologies became cheaper that GPS receivers really became a consumer product.

Almost as soon as that happened, smartphones equipped with GPS came along and now most people are able to do “turn-by-turn” navigation with an app in their phone.

**Uses**

GPS was originally designed to provide position to the US Army, Navy and Air Force; but since its introduction, it has been used for many applications it was never designed for.

It is used to avoid collisions in shipping, with all ocean-going vessels required to report via something known as the Automatic Identification System (AIS).