

Privacy Protections for Use of License Plate Surveillance Technology LC 205 (2014)

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Automatic License Plate Reader (ALPR) Surveillance Technology

ALPRs are made up of high-speed cameras designed to capture a photograph of each and every passing license plate, combined with software that analyzes these photographs to identify the license plate number. ALPR cameras can be placed almost anywhere, from mobile vehicles like patrol cars to fixed objects like bridges and overpasses. On taking a photograph, ALPRs quickly identify any plates within the photograph, convert each plate number into machine readable text, check each plate against “hot lists” of plates that have been uploaded into the system, provide an instant alert to law enforcement of a match, then store the photo, plate number, date, time and location of where each vehicle has been seen.¹



ALPRs Pose Privacy Risks

Several law enforcement agencies are now deploying license plate reader surveillance technology across Oregon.² These agencies are retaining the location information and photograph of every vehicle that crosses the camera’s path, not simply those that generate a hit. In the aggregate, this stored private location data can reveal the travel histories of thousands of Oregonians who have committed no crime. Longer retention periods and the absence of restrictions on sharing allow the government to assemble the individual puzzle pieces of where we have been over time into a single, high-resolution image of our lives.

“The risk is that individuals will become more cautious in the exercise of their protected rights of expression, protest, association, and political participation because they consider themselves under constant surveillance.”

- International Association of Chiefs of Police, Privacy Impact Assessment Report for the Utilization of License Plate Readers (2009)³

LC 266 Aims to Protect Privacy and Public Safety

Not only are ALPRs widely deployed, but few agencies place any substantial restrictions on how the surveillance technology can be used. LC 266 sets out clear guidelines for government use of ALPRs that promote consistency across the state, provide law enforcement with the tools it needs to protect public safety, and safeguards against unchecked privacy invasion of Oregonians. The new law will enable law enforcement to preserve all data needed for ongoing criminal investigations and will require data about innocent people to be deleted.

¹ Except where otherwise noted, all information in this brief can be sourced to the July 2013 report by the ACLU, *You Are Being Tracked: How License Plate Readers Are Being Used To Record Americans’ Movements*. <https://www.aclu.org/files/assets/071613-aclu-alprreport-opt-v05.pdf>

² In response to a 2012 public records request from the ACLU-OR, law enforcement agencies in the following jurisdictions indicated that they use ALPRs: Clackamas, Medford, Oregon City, Portland, Salem

³ <http://www.theiacp.org/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=N%2BE2wvY%2F1QU%3D&tabid=87>