IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center
LICENSE PLATE READERS
Model Policy
August 2010

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide officers with guidelines on the proper use of license plate recognition (LPR) systems, also commonly known as license plate reader systems.

II. POLICY

The availability and use of LPR systems have provided many opportunities for the enhancement of productivity, effectiveness, and officer safety. It is the policy of this agency that all members abide by the guidelines set forth herein when using LPR systems.

III. DEFINITIONS

FOUO: For Official Use Only

LPR: License Plate Recognition/License Plate Reader

OCR: Optical Character Recognition

Read: Digital images of license plates and vehicles and associated metadata (e.g., date, time, and geographic coordinates associated with the vehicle image capture) that are captured by the LPR system.

Alert: A visual and/or auditory notice that is triggered when the LPR system receives a potential "hit" on a license plate.

Hit: A read matched to a plate that has previously been registered on an agency's "hot list" of vehicle plates related to stolen vehicles, wanted vehicles, or other factors supporting investigation, or which has been manually registered by a user for further investigation.

Hot list: License plate numbers of stolen cars, vehicles owned by persons of interest, and vehicles associated with AMBER Alerts that are regularly added to "hot lists" circulated among law enforcement agencies. Hot list information can come from a variety of sources, including stolen vehicle information from the National Insurance Crime Bureau and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), as well as national AMBER Alerts and Department of Homeland Security watch lists. Departments of motor vehicles can provide lists of expired registration tags, and law enforcement agencies can interface their own, locally compiled hot lists to the LPR system. These lists serve an officer safety function as well as an investigatory purpose. In addition to agency supported hot lists, users may also manually add license plate numbers to hot lists in order to be alerted if and when a vehicle license plate of interest is "read" by the LPR system.

Fixed LPR system: LPR cameras that are permanently affixed to a structure, such as a pole, a traffic barrier, or a bridge.

Mobile LPR system: LPR cameras that are affixed, either permanently (hardwired) or temporarily (e.g., magnet-mounted), to a law enforcement vehicle for mobile deployment.

Portable LPR system: LPR cameras that are transportable and can be moved and deployed in a variety of venues as needed, such as a traffic barrel or speed radar sign.

IV. PROCEDURES

  A. General

    1. The use of LPR systems is restricted to public safety–related missions of this agency.

    2. LPR systems and associated equipment and databases are authorized for official public safety purposes. Misuse of this equipment and associated databases, or data, may be subject to sanctions and/or disciplinary actions.

    3. LPR systems and LPR data and associated media are the property of this agency and intended for use in conducting official business with limited exceptions noted elsewhere in this policy.

  B. Administration

    1. The agency shall designate an employee(s) with administrative oversight for LPR system deployment and operations who is (are) responsible for the following:

      a. Establishing protocols for access, collection, storage, and retention of LPR data and associated media files

      b. Establishing protocols to preserve and document LPR reads and "alerts" or "hits" that are acted on in the field or associated with investigations or prosecutions

      c. Establishing protocols to establish and ensure the security and integrity of data captured, stored, and/or retained by the LPR system

      d. Ensuring the proper selection of the personnel approved to operate the LPR system and maintaining an adequate number of trainees;

      e. Maintaining records identifying approved LPR deployments and documenting their results, including appropriate documentation of significant incidents and arrests that are related to LPR usage

      f. Authorizing any requests for LPR systems use or data access according to the policies and guidelines of this agency

    2. Designated, trained personnel shall check equipment on a regular basis to ensure functionality and camera alignment. Any equipment that falls outside expected functionality shall be removed from service until deficiencies have been corrected.

    3. LPR systems repairs, hardware or software, shall be made by agency authorized sources.

  C. License Plate Reader System Usage

    1. LPR operation and access to LPR collected data shall be for official agency purposes only.

    2. Only officers who have been properly trained in the use and operational protocols of the LPR systems shall be permitted to use it.

    3. At the start of each shift users must ensure that the LPR system has been updated with the most current hot lists available.

    4. LPR Alerts/Hits: Prior to initiation of the stop:

      a. Visually verify that the vehicle plate number matches the plate number run by the LPR system, including both alphanumeric characters of the license plate and the state of issuance.

b. Verify the current status of the plate through dispatch or MDT query when circumstances allow.
5. In each case in which an alert or a hit is triggered, the user should record the disposition of the alert and the hit into the LPR system
6. Hot lists may be updated manually if the user enters a specific plate into the LPR system and wants to be alerted when that plate is located. Whenever a plate is manually entered into the LPR system, the officer should document the reason.
7. Special Details: LPR use during nontraditional deployments (e.g., special operations or during a criminal investigation) must be approved by the administrator.
8. Searches of historical data within the LPR system should be done in accordance with established departmental policies and procedures.

D. LPR Data Sharing and Dissemination
LPR data should be considered FOUO and can be shared for legitimate law enforcement purposes:
1. When LPR data are disseminated outside the agency, it should be documented in a secondary dissemination log.
2. Information sharing among agencies should be dictated in accordance with MOUs (memoranda of understanding) or established departmental policies.

E. Retention
Please refer to the *License Plate Reader Concepts and Issues Paper* for a discussion on retention.

Acknowledgment

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Every effort has been made by the IACP National Law Enforcement Policy Center staff and advisory board to ensure that this model policy incorporates the most current information and contemporary professional judgment on this issue. However, law enforcement administrators should be cautioned that no "model" policy can meet all the needs of any given law enforcement agency. Each law enforcement agency operates in a unique environment of federal court rulings, state laws, local ordinances, regulations, judicial and administrative decisions and collective bargaining agreements that must be considered. In addition, the formulation of specific agency policies must take into account local political and community perspectives and customs, prerogatives and demands; often divergent law enforcement strategies and philosophies; and the impact of varied agency resource capabilities among other factors.