

In response to a recent *Washington Post* article regarding Flock Safety and license plate reader technology, the Fairfax County Police Department (FCPD) would like to provide additional context regarding our License Plate Reader (LPR) Program, the safeguards we have established, and the oversight measures that govern its use.

Law enforcement agencies throughout the National Capital Region have used license plate reader technology for approximately two decades. LPR is one of many technology and data systems used by FCPD each day to support criminal investigations, locate missing persons, recover stolen vehicles, and enhance public safety.

Unlike many law enforcement data systems, modern LPR platforms provide detailed audit trails documenting user searches and activity. FCPD has supplemented these capabilities with additional County and Department safeguards designed to strengthen access controls, protect data, ensure appropriate use, and provide meaningful oversight. As a result, the LPR Program is among the most extensively audited and closely monitored technology programs used by FCPD.

Program Development

Advancements in LPR technology, coupled with significant reductions in cost, provided an opportunity for FCPD to substantially enhance its existing LPR capabilities in 2022. Before expanding the program, FCPD conducted extensive research, engaged community members and other stakeholders, and developed a data-driven model to guide deployment and use.

The resulting program was intentionally built around several core principles: **data-driven deployment, training, accountability, auditing, transparency, and community engagement.**

Stakeholder Engagement

During early meetings with community groups, business owners, and area homeowner's associations, one of the most frequently raised concerns involved the length of time LPR data would be retained.

In response to those concerns, FCPD voluntarily reduced its LPR data retention period from one year to 30 days. When Virginia law subsequently established a 21-day retention requirement effective July 1, 2025, FCPD further reduced its retention period in advance of the law's effective date.

Community concerns regarding camera locations also helped shape the program. FCPD established a data-driven deployment process that uses crime information to evaluate where cameras can provide the greatest public safety benefit.

Data-Driven Deployment

Crime data has been, and remains, the first step in determining where an LPR camera may be installed. FCPD also evaluates the types and patterns of crime occurring in an area to determine whether LPR technology is an appropriate and effective tool for that location.

This process is intended to ensure camera placement is based on demonstrated public safety needs rather than arbitrary deployment.

Training and Program Foundation

FCPD built its expanded LPR Program on a foundation of education, accountability, and oversight. Prior to the installation of the expanded camera network, online-only training was replaced with mandatory in-person instruction for authorized personnel.

During this training, officers are taught the authorized purposes for using LPR technology, informed that searches and user activity are permanently logged for auditing purposes, and advised of the potential consequences associated with misuse or unauthorized access.

The expectation is clear from the beginning: access to LPR technology is provided for legitimate law enforcement purposes and is subject to review.

Search Requirements and Accountability

Department policy requires LPR searches to be connected to an authorized law enforcement purpose and documented through the appropriate case or event information.

FCPD also advocated for changes to LPR software that increased accountability by reducing reliance on unrestricted free-text explanations and requiring users to select standardized crime or incident categories and enter a corresponding case or event number. Once these capabilities became available, FCPD implemented them for its personnel.

These requirements create additional accountability at the time of the search while also producing more consistent information for subsequent audits.

Auditing and Oversight

FCPD began conducting monthly LPR audits from the earliest stages of the expanded program, well before such reviews became a broader focus nationally.

Our auditing process has continued to evolve. FCPD now uses both human review and technology-assisted auditing each month. Personnel responsible for the audit spend approximately **40 hours each month** reviewing search activity and examining potentially abnormal patterns, questionable activity, or indicators of possible misuse.

Each monthly audit is then presented to an FCPD commander for an additional level of review. Additional safeguards are in place to preserve the integrity of the process, including independent review of personnel responsible for conducting audits and restrictions preventing the reviewing commander from conducting LPR searches.

FCPD was also an early adopter of AI-assisted auditing tools designed to identify unusual search patterns and help reviewers detect activity that warrants additional examination. Technology does not replace human oversight; rather, it provides another layer of review to strengthen the audit process.

Transparency

FCPD recently introduced the **RTCC Transparency Page**, which provides the public with detailed information regarding the Department's use of technology, including LPR.

The webpage is updated regularly and explains how the technology is used, how information is retained, the safeguards governing access, and the auditing process. It also addresses frequently asked questions regarding the program, including FCPD's longstanding prohibition on the use of LPR technology for immigration enforcement.

Transparency remains an important component of maintaining public trust as technology continues to evolve.

Public Safety Results

LPR technology has become an important investigative tool and is used in many significant cases throughout Fairfax County. It can assist investigators in identifying suspect vehicles, recovering stolen vehicles, locating missing or endangered persons, and developing investigative leads that may otherwise take considerably more time to identify.

Since implementation of the expanded program in 2022:

- **More than 1,500 cases** have substantially benefited from LPR technology.
- **More than 549 stolen vehicles** have been recovered, with a combined value of nearly **\$10 million**.
- **More than 1,700 felony charges** have been filed in cases supported by LPR technology.
- **65 firearms** have been recovered.
- **57 missing persons** have been located.

These statistics represent more than numbers. In many instances, LPR technology has allowed officers and detectives to identify critical information within minutes rather than hours or days.

Examples of notable Fairfax County cases include:

- **Carjacking Crew:** A regional carjacking crew was identified after its vehicle passed an LPR camera while the suspects were traveling to commit another carjacking. The investigation resulted in arrests and the recovery of five firearms.
- **Homicide:** A man who shot and killed a victim after a dispute fled in an unknown vehicle. LPR technology was used to identify the suspect vehicle which led to his swift arrest.
- **Church Burglaries:** Detectives used LPR information to help identify a suspect responsible for burglarizing multiple churches after investigators obtained only a blurred image of the suspect vehicle.
- **Missing Couple:** A missing couple who had been driving throughout Northern Virginia overnight while lost and confused was located approximately two minutes after their vehicle passed an LPR camera.
- **Stolen Tractor-Trailer:** A newly stolen tractor-trailer valued at more than \$120,000 was recovered, and the driver was arrested, after the vehicle passed an LPR camera while entering a shopping center.

- **Missing Man with Dementia:** FCPD's RTCC identified a missing man with dementia through LPR information while he was driving in Chesterfield County. FCPD coordinated with the appropriate jurisdiction to safely stop the vehicle and reunite him with his family after he had been lost for approximately five hours.
- **Organized Retail Theft:** A retail theft suspect was identified after passing an LPR camera while entering a shopping center. The resulting investigation led to an arrest on 17 charges associated with theft offenses committed over approximately two years.

Moving Forward

As the *Washington Post* article appropriately highlights, the potential misuse or abuse of technology is a serious concern and requires meaningful safeguards and oversight.

FCPD has approached LPR technology with that responsibility in mind. Many of the safeguards now being discussed or recommended nationally, including documented search purposes, restricted access, mandatory training, recurring audits, supervisory review, limited data retention, enhanced audit tools, and public transparency were incorporated into FCPD's program proactively, in some instances years before they became broader recommendations or requirements.

Technology alone does not create public trust. **Strong policy, meaningful oversight, transparency, accountability, and demonstrated public safety value must accompany its use.** Those principles have guided FCPD's LPR Program since its expansion and will continue to guide the program as the technology evolves.