

Richmond Police Department (RPD) Use of License Plate Reader (LPR) Technology



RPD, like many other agencies in Virginia and nationally, uses license plate readers (LPR) for investigative purposes. In Richmond, they have proven particularly effective in investigating violent crimes (murders, shootings, robberies) as well as hit and run fatalities.

The Technology:

The predominant LPR technology used by RPD is provided under contract by Flock Safety. Flock Safety installs LPR devices at locations requested by RPD. The LPR device captures a still photo of a passing vehicle / vehicle license plate. Along with the photo, the license plate information and general characteristics of the vehicle (type, make, color) are obtained. This information is retained for 21 days for access by investigating RPD personnel before being purged. Flock Safety owns the 99 devices deployed in the city and manages the data. However, RPD owns the data and determines access.

Virginia Law:

LPR information can only be used for a valid law enforcement purpose. The Virginia state legislation (HB 2724) effective July 1, 2025, does the following:

- Restricts use to criminal investigations, missing persons, alerts for wanted parties, stolen cars.
- Limits retention of vehicle information to 21 days.
- Restricts sharing of data to Virginia law enforcement agencies only.
- Requires detailed tracking of all use / queries of the data.
- Specifies development of a LPR “model policy” by Virginia State Police (VSP) for ongoing audits, training and reporting use information to VSP. RPD has adopted this policy / audit regimen.
- Makes misuse of LPR information a state criminal offense (class 1 misdemeanor).
 - At RPD, misuse is also a policy violation potentially leading to termination.

RPD does not investigate or enforce federal immigration laws which are the domain of federal agencies. RPD does not, and by state law, cannot share its LPR data with federal agencies or any agency outside the state of Virginia.

Court Ruling:

RPD's use of LPR has been upheld in court. When reviewed in a robbery case, Senior U.S. District Court Judge Robert Payne ruled that the Flock cameras aren't so widespread that they create an invasion of privacy. And further, the Flock technology merely enhances the ability of police to access information that anyone is able to see on public roads. (U.S. v Kumiko Martin Jr. decision on October 11, 2024). More recently, on January 27, 2026, use of Flock LPR was upheld in a ruling by Chief U.S. District Judge Mark Davis in a civil case (Schmidt v City of Norfolk). The judge ruled that use of ALPR is not an unconstitutional search and does not violate reasonable expectations of privacy. Further, a few “hits” per day did not reach the level of comprehensive tracking.

Data security and access concerns:

RPD has ongoing discussions with Flock Safety regarding system capabilities, access, data sharing and security. Flock provides the LPR device hardware and the systems architecture to collect LPR data, retain it for 21 days and allow user access under prescribed criteria. RPD owns and has all rights to the data collected – how long it is retained and who may access through RPD directed permissions. RPD doesn't, and by law cannot, share LPR data beyond other Virginia law enforcement agencies, e.g. Henrico PD, Chesterfield PD. No data is shared with federal agencies or other agencies outside of Virginia.

As for data security standards, Flock Safety is compliant with standards for CJIS (Criminal Justice Information Services) and SOC 2 (System and Organization Type II Certification). They have had no breach of their LPR data / systems. There are two issues that have been reported on that RPD has discussed with Flock Safety. One is the availability of some Flock LPR search audit logs on a website "haveibeenflocked.com". This information is for license plates that were queried by a specific agency at a certain time. The information was obtained legally through a series of FOIA requests to certain agencies who provided that audit log information on their searches. Some LPR audit log information included data captured by RPD's Flock devices due to a "national look-up" feature in Flock that allowed agencies outside of Virginia query RPD Flock devices as well. That feature was disabled. In addition, the ALPR legislation enacted July 1, 2025 prohibits such access.

The second issue involves Flock's camera product referred to as Condor – a pan-tilt-zoom (PTZ) video camera, different from a Flock LPR device. As reported and explained by Flock Safety, approx. 60 of these cameras were sent to one of Flock's service provider partners to conduct compatibility testing. When returned to Flock, those cameras were not configured/reset prior to deployment. The result was that the live view video on this set of cameras was not sufficiently protected and was accessible to unauthorized parties. Only live view was available, recorded video could not be accessed and there was no broader systems breach. Upon discovery, Flock Safety immediately took those cameras out of service.

Other Technologies:

RPD uses other camera technologies that do not have the same LPR capability described above. Traffic enforcement cameras – school speed zone, bus stop sign and soon, red light cameras – only capture a license plate for that traffic violation. Separate from Flock Safety, that data is not retained for investigation of other offenses. Flock Safety is also the provider of RPD's gunshot detection system which alerts RPD to the sound of gunfire where deployed.