

WAYNESBORO POLICE DEPARTMENT GENERAL ORDER

GO Number:

Subject: License Plate Readers

Effective Date:

Approved By:

Revised:

Policy Review Date:

VLEPSC Standards:

POLICY: The Waynesboro Police Department (WPD) will use license plate readers to increase efficiency in recovering stolen vehicles as well as enhancing other criminal investigations.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this General Order is to establish guidelines for the deployment, maintenance, training, and data storage associated with the usage of License plate Recognition (LPR) systems by WPD personnel. The LPR program seeks to reduce the impact caused by auto theft and other vehicle-related crimes. The program is also intended to enhance public security at designated locations by supplementing existing security measures. The WPD is committed to providing homeland security, increasing the detection of stolen vehicles and detecting terrorist watch list subjects, wanted persons, missing persons and other vehicle related crimes that impact the safety of citizens.

PROCEDURE:

Overview

The identification of stolen vehicles and stolen license plates along with enhancing the WPD's criminal investigation capabilities are the primary focus of the LPR program. Other databases can be imported for use such as the terrorist watch list, sex offender violators and vehicles being sought for local law enforcement purposes which can become an additional focus of the LPR program.

LPR technology uses specialized cameras and computers to quickly capture large numbers of license plate photographs and compares them to a list of plates of interest. The plates of interest are referred to as a "hot list." LPR systems can identify a target plate within seconds of contact with it, allowing law enforcement to identify target vehicles that might otherwise be overlooked. LPR systems also record every license plate they "see" and record the location, date, and time of each license plate read to varying degrees of accuracy. The technology is available in mobile systems mounted on police vehicles and fixed camera systems that can be mounted on poles or on the roadside. Mobile LPR systems are designed to allow officers to patrol at normal speeds while the system reads many license plates they come in contact with and alerts the officer if the tag is a match to a "hot list."

The Waynesboro IT Department will house the Department's LPR System Operations Center server, which is the central repository for all license plates scanned by the WPD's LPR systems. All collected data will be maintained on this server. Operations Center provides a storage and search structure for the license plate information being collected in the field.

The central database supports the reporting and query functions. Authorized personnel have the ability to:

- Look for a license plate or partial license plate in the history and view the image and location of matches
- View maps with the location of plate reads and alarms
- View statistical reports on reads and alarms
- View reads and alarms for a specific geographic area and time frame

Definitions

Alarm – A positive indication, by visual and/or audible signal, of a potential match between data on the hot list and a license plate scanned by the LPR system. An alarm is not conclusive confirmation that a license plate is wanted. Additional investigation is always warranted when an alarm is indicated.

Download – The transfer of hot list data from VCIN or other data sources consisting of license plates and associated data. The LPR Coordinator will develop the procedure for accessing various downloads and getting the data to the LPR mobile computer.

External Hot List – A database populated with items of specific concern to the investigative and/or enforcement interests of law enforcement in the City of Waynesboro. External hot lists originate from some outside agency. This may include, but is not limited to, Terrorist Screening Center watch list, stolen/wanted vehicles and license plates, wanted and missing persons, cautions, and license plates associated with Amber Alerts or various watch lists provided for law enforcement purposes.

Local Hot List – An addition to the LPR server database that is appended to the External Hot List. The local hot list consists of license plates of local investigative significance entered into the server hot list using a procedure developed by the LPR Manager. The local hot list must be validated on a schedule using a procedure developed by the LPR Manager.

License Plate Recognition (LPR) system – Equipment consisting of camera(s), computer, and computer software used to automatically recognize and interpret the characters on vehicle license plates. This data is then compared against a list of license plates bearing some significance to law enforcement.

LPR Manager - Employee designated by the Chief and charged with the management of the LPR program.

LPR Coordinator – Employee designated by the Chief and charged with administration, troubleshooting, training, repairing and coordinating all aspects of the LPR systems for the Police Department.

LPR-Generated Data – All information, including location, date and time of a license plate encounter, the optical character recognition interpreted data, and any LPR-generated digital photographic image(s) of the license plate and vehicle generated entirely through the use of and by the LPR equipment.

LPR Operator – A properly trained user of an LPR system.

LPR Research Team – An approved group of WPD employees and partners participating in a study investigating the deployment of LPR at the WPD and/or in a wider region.

Responsibilities

LPR Operators:

LPR operators shall receive formal training prior to using the LPR system.

Employees shall exercise safety when operating the LPR system. Use of any device during the operation of a motor vehicle must comply with current state law. Employees will pay careful attention to driving and will not use the LPR system in any manner that would endanger or distract them, resulting in an accident.

It shall be the responsibility of each LPR operator to ensure the download of the most recent hot list occurs on the mobile computer prior to deployment of the LPR equipment.

The hot list download will be completed in accordance with procedures designated by the LPR Coordinator.

LPR Operators will develop an understanding of how LPR technology can help with investigations and will adapt their patrol methods to include the changes brought by this new technology.

The LPR system works passively and will continue to read license plates, sound alarms and capture data about the license plate environment even when other programs are being used on the computer. When using an LPR-equipped vehicle, the LPR operators should have the system in operation to include a connection to the LPR server so as to maximize the opportunity to scan vehicles, compare them to the hot list and collect LPR data in a central repository.

LPR operators will enter additional information into the LPR system as needed. Broadcast and look out information received should be manually entered immediately

upon receipt by the LPR operator into the local hot list on the mobile computer. The reason for the entry shall be included in the “note” portion of the entry screen (i.e. stolen vehicle, missing person, abduction, Amber Alert, robbery suspect) with sufficient detail to allow an officer to make an enforcement decision when an alert is sounded. Manual entries into the mobile computer will be overwritten at the next hotlist download.

Upon completing a manual entry the LPR operator should query the mobile computer LPR data to determine if the license plate was scanned previously. If accessible, the LPR operator should query the Operations Center to determine if the license plate was scanned previously.

LPR operators will clear information entered into the LPR system as needed when the information no longer is needed for search purposes.

Upon receiving an alarm, the LPR operator will use the displayed information to determine the accuracy and nature of the alarm. The LPR operator will visually verify that the subject tag and the actual read on the LPR screen are the same (i.e. correct letters, numbers, state and any other information that can be matched).

Once the user has confirmed that the alarm is valid, the LPR operator will take appropriate action based on the type of alarm in accordance with training. If the alarm is for a stolen or felony vehicle, the operator will confirm the alert is still active by running a check on the information through NCIC/VCIN and WEOC. Receipt of a stolen or felony vehicle LPR alarm may not rise to the level of reasonable suspicion and is certainly not sufficient probable cause to arrest without confirmation that the vehicle is still wanted. If the alarm is for another type of hit or alert, the LPR operator will read the description of the alarm and use the appropriate action or reporting method to handle the alarm. Confirmation of the alarm is essential prior to the stop of any person.

Ensure that all positive “hits” on the Terrorist Watch List are reported to the Terrorist Screening Center (TSC). All Terrorist Watch List hits will be handled by phone. There will be no radio traffic concerning Terrorist hits except in the case of emergencies. LPR Operators must be familiar with the three levels of Terrorist Watch List hits:

- Level (1) stop hold and contact TSC
- Level (2) keep a visual and contact TSC for further instructions and do not alert subjects of your presence
- Level (3) document information, take no action, report information to TSC

The LPR operator will report usage of the LPR systems as required by the LPR Coordinator.

Some LPR operators will be power users and may assist the LPR Coordinator with training of operators, troubleshooting problems with the LPR system, helping their co-workers understand the value of the LPR system and improving the operations of the LPR system.

LPR Coordinator:

Create all necessary forms and complete any administrative functions related to the LPR systems.

Maintain forms or electronic systems for tracking LPR usage.

Work with the LPR Manager to coordinate training, service, repair and replacement of the LPR systems and software. The LPR Coordinator will ensure that all maintenance and repair of LPR equipment is completed either personally or by partners such as the Waynesboro Information Technology Department.

Maintain the current LPR software and apply updates as needed.

Install the LPR software on the computers that the LPR operators use.

Ensure that a sufficient number of spare computers also have LPR software installed so that if the usual LPR computer is out of service a spare computer can be used.

Develop the procedure, in cooperation with the LPR manager, for providing the most effective way to get the hot list download to the LPR mobile computer and LPR data to the Operations Center.

Develop and maintain relationships with surrounding jurisdictions' LPR coordinators.

Supervisors:

Supervisors will monitor the use of LPR systems and ensure they are being deployed regularly. Supervisors will ensure LPR systems are deployed in the possession of a trained LPR operator.

Supervisors will ensure significant incidents and arrests where LPR usage is involved are properly documented and communicated to the LPR Coordinator and Manager.

Whenever possible, the LPR systems should be assigned to maximize its ability to scan many license plates.

Supervisors will develop an understanding of how LPR technology can help with investigations and will adapt their patrol supervision to include the changes brought by this new technology.

The supervisor shall investigate any damage to LPR's in accordance with established procedures. Damage will also be reported to the LPR Coordinator and any reports or documentation will be forwarded to the LPR Coordinator.

LPR Manager:

The manager is charged with the creation of policy about how the LPR will be integrated into and used during WPD operations. The manager will also determine how the LPR system will not be used.

The manager will develop a method, in cooperation with the LPR Coordinator, to ensure the LPR system is updated with appropriate hot lists in a timely manner and to ensure the LPR data on the mobile computer will be transferred to the Operations Center server for storage and subsequent investigative access.

The manager will ensure data is purged from the LPR server two years after it was collected unless it has or can reasonably be expected to have evidentiary value.

The manager will develop partnerships with other agencies using LPR in an effort to increase the efficiencies of the systems.

The manager will validate training proposed for LPR operators and procedures developed by the LPR Coordinator to ensure LPR operators are properly trained before accessing LPR data or participating in LPR field operations, to ensure training is timely and adequate, to ensure proper operations in accordance with this General Order and to ensure all training is documented.

The manager will approve users of the LPR system authorized to access password protected data collected on the Operations Center server and conduct LPR stored data queries.

The manager will interface with the LPR Research Group and approve any proposed research efforts.

The manager will recommend policy to the Chief of Police.

LPR Research Group:

Consist of vetted members from National Institute of Justice, George Mason University, SPAWAR, other government agencies, selected Waynesboro PD members and others deemed appropriate.

The Group will conduct a study investigating the deployment of LPR at the WPD or, ideally, in a wider region. The goal of the group is to develop best practices, model policies, assess actual effectiveness, collect lessons learned and then document these findings for the purpose of sharing.

Data Retention and Use

LPR equipment has the capability to store LPR-generated data collected during the license plate detection and identification phase of use. Data will be stored on City of Waynesboro servers and will not be stored outside the control of the City of Waynesboro.

LPR-generated data will be retained for a period of two years because it most resembles “logs” as defined by the State Librarian’s Record Retention Schedule for Law Enforcement Records. In the event that data to be stored exceeds a reasonable amount, the storage period may be reduced by the Chief of Police.

Access to plate scan information is restricted to trained and WPD approved personnel with assigned passwords for criminal justice and approved research purposes. In furtherance of a criminal justice purpose, LPR data may be shared verbally by a member of the WPD with another criminal justice agency. Any other use of this data is strictly forbidden.

LPR Maintenance

The LPR operator should not modify the LPR equipment or software operating system without direction from the LPR Coordinator.

Under no circumstances shall an LPR unit be connected to or removed from the vehicle while the LPR unit is powered up. Connection or disconnection of the camera unit from the LPR system when powered will result in significant damage to the LPR system.

Any time the LPR unit is disconnected or removed from the vehicle, it shall be placed in a protective storage case or the LPR’s original packaging and secured to prevent damage.

LPR camera lenses may be cleaned with glass cleaner or mild soap and water and a soft, non-abrasive cloth.

Damage to LPR equipment shall be immediately reported to a supervisor. The supervisor shall document (and investigate, if necessary) the damage in accordance with established procedures. Damage will also be reported to the LPR Coordinator and any reports or documentation will be forwarded to the LPR Coordinator.

The LPR Coordinator shall be notified of any LPR equipment needing maintenance or repair. The LPR Coordinator will ensure that all maintenance and repair of LPR equipment is completed.