



## **Feds: National License Plate Reading Program Rolling Out**

Despite citizen resistance to license plate readers in general, the Federal government is creating a dragnet of scanners to locate vehicles throughout the nation. Under the guise of Customs and Border Protection, the program will work with private vendors to scan and aggregate pictures. □ TN Editor

Customs will have access to commercial datasets including license plate images and data from parking garages, toll booth cameras and financial institutions, as well as local governments and law enforcement.

The Customs and Border Protection agency has been collecting vehicle information at the border using license plate readers for years. Now, the agency will begin incorporating third-party license plate reader data collected from local governments, law enforcement and the private sector and maintained by a commercial vendor.

A [privacy impact assessment published July 7](#) outlines the agency's plan to incorporate datasets maintained by third-party vendors as part of its

investigations. The latest update is the first [since December 2017](#), when CBP authorized the use of license plate readers for data collection.

“To meet its vast mission requirements, [CBP relies on a variety of law enforcement tools and techniques](#) for law enforcement and border security,” the PIA states. “One such tool is license plate reader (LPR) technology, which consists of high-speed cameras and related equipment mounted on vehicles or in fixed locations that automatically and without direct human control locate, focus on, and photograph license plates and vehicles that come into range of the device.”

Each data collection—or “read”—gathers the vehicle’s license plate number; an image of the vehicle, including make and model; where it is registered; the location and owner of the camera; and any associated location information, including GPS coordinates. “LPR technology may also capture—within the image—the environment surrounding a vehicle, which may include drivers and passengers,” the impact assessment notes.

In the past, officers—customs officials—and agents—Border Patrol—could only access data from CBP-owned and operated readers.

With the release of the PIA, CBP can also use data from third-party vendors. Those databases contain information collected by “private businesses (e.g., parking garages), local governments (e.g., toll booth cameras), law enforcement agencies, and financial institutions via their contracted repossession companies,” the PIA states.

“The LPR commercial aggregator services store, index, and sell access to the images, along with the time and location of the collection. CBP will only have access to images from U.S. based cameras that are part of the commercial aggregator’s services,” the document adds.

CBP offices may have already obtained data from commercial databases prior to the release of the PIA, the document states, but officers were restricted from making “operational use” of the data before the PIA was published.

Using the new system, CBP agents and officers can enter a license plate

number, the make or model of a vehicle or the location of the license plate reader and receive “any responsive records” from the database, “with a primary focus on reads occurring within the last 30 days,” the document states.

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