

License Plate Reader

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Issuing Authority: Chief Meredith Dominick	

401.1 PURPOSE AND SCOPE

The purpose of this directive is to establish guidelines for the proper use, maintenance, and deployment of the Department's License Plate Reader (LPR) and its software. The availability and use of the License Plate Reader system provides opportunities for enhanced productivity, effectiveness, and officer safety.

The LPR System is a computer-based system that utilizes special cameras to capture license plate information. The LPR System captures an infrared image of a license plate and converts it to a text file using Optical Character Recognition ("OCR") technology. The text is compared to various hot lists generated by local, state and federal law enforcement agencies, including the National Crime Information Center ("NCIC"), and generates an alert when there is a hit.

The LPR System identifies license plates and will not identify the person operating the motor vehicle. The Department may, as a separate step and for legitimate law enforcement purposes per the Federal Driver's Privacy Protection Act and as set forth in this directive, undertake to identify the owner of the vehicle in the event the LPR system generates an alert, such as by running the license plate number through the respective State's Department of Motor Vehicle (DMV) database.

The Department shall utilize hot lists that further the above-specified goals of the LPR system where there is a legitimate and specific law enforcement reason for identifying a vehicle associated with an outstanding arrest warrant; vehicles related to missing persons investigations; vehicles associated with AMBER Alerts; stolen vehicles; vehicles that are reasonably believed to be involved in the commission of a crime; vehicles that are registered to or are reasonably believed to be operated by persons who do not have a valid operator's license or who are on the revoked or suspended list; vehicles with expired registrations; vehicles registered to persons who are subject to a restraining order issued by a court or by the Parole Board, or who are subject to any other duly issued order restricting their movements; vehicles registered to persons wanted by a law enforcement agency who are of interest in a specific investigation; and vehicles registered to persons who are on any watch list issued by a State or Federal agency responsible for homeland security when information has been received concerning a specific individual.

All information in the LPR systems will be considered confidential and law enforcement sensitive. Members will be held accountable for and must be able to articulate the legitimate law enforcement purpose for the use and dissemination of received information.

Chambersburg Police Department

Supplemental Manual

License Plate Reader

401.2 DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this directive, the following definitions apply:

Active LPR Data – Information provided to an LPR operator in real-time in the form of alerts that a license plate number contained in the hot list is near an LPR unit.

Alert – A visual and/or auditory signal activated upon the read of a license plate by the LPR system that has NOT BEEN VISUALLY VERIFIED by an officer against the photo in the LPR system.

Confirmation (Confirmed Hit) – A hit by the LPR system that HAS BEEN CONFIRMED as valid and active by the original entering agency through a secondary check.

Covert E-mail Alert – An alert sent via e-mail to the submitting member. The officer operating the LPR will not receive an alert regarding the hit.

Covert Hot List – A hot list accessible only to specified members engaged in covert operations (i.e. Drug Task Force).

Evidentiary Hit - A hit resulting in either law enforcement action (i.e. arrest or traffic stop) or documentation related to an active investigation. This LPR information may be downloaded and treated as evidence.

Hit – A read matched to a license plate that has previously been registered on the Department's "hot list" of vehicle plates or on the local "hot list" on the LPR's computer that has been added by a user.

Historical LPR Data – A database containing the dates, times, and locations of individually identifiable motor vehicles.

Hot List – Data files extracted from the law enforcement databases which contain a listing of stolen license plates, stolen vehicles, wanted persons, and other vehicles/persons actively being sought by a law enforcement agency such as Amber/Silver Alert vehicles/persons. These data extracts are generally facilitated at numerous times per day in an effort to provide current data.

Live Query Transaction – A hit by the LPR System that HAS BEEN VALIDATED as active but HAS NOT BEEN CONFIRMED as valid by the entering agency.

LPR – License Plate Recognition/License Plate Reader.

LPR System – The system in its entirety, including all LPR cameras, software and collected data.

Non-Encounter Alert – An alert indicating the officer not to stop the vehicle based on provided information alone. The officer should observe the vehicle and report pertinent information to the requesting member.

Operations Center Software – Software that serves as a repository of all data collected by the deployed LPR systems. This software acts as a data warehouse that can be queried for information pursuant to a law enforcement or public safety function.

Read – The capture of digital images or license plates and vehicles with associated metadata (date, time, GPS coordinates with vehicle image capture).

Chambersburg Police Department

Supplemental Manual

License Plate Reader

Sources of information- Include but are not limited to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC), Amber Alerts, Department of Homeland Security Watch lists, Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, or local information added manually by members of the Department trained in the proper use of the LPR. These data sources are generally facilitated at numerous times per day in an effort to provide current data.

Note – local warrants and no contact orders require manual submissions when not entered into NCIC.

Tentative Hit – An alert by the LPR System that HAS BEEN VISUALLY VERIFIED by the officer against the LPR hot list and photo but HAS NOT BEEN VALIDATED by the officer or dispatch as a live query transaction or CONFIRMED AS VALID with the original entering agency.

401.3 AUTHORIZED USAGE

Use of the LPR system and/or Operations Center software is restricted to the law enforcement or public safety functions of the Department. Such uses and goals include, but are not limited to, providing information to officers that will assist in on-going criminal investigations, crime prevention, crime detection, the apprehension of wanted persons, ensuring the safety of vulnerable individuals through the recovery of missing and endangered persons and improving the quality of life in the community through identification and removal of stolen, unregistered and uninsured motor vehicles. Information obtained from the LPR and/or Operations Center software will not be used for personal reasons or for reasons inconsistent with the law enforcement/public safety functions of the Department.

Information obtained from any or all LPR system components will only be disseminated to other law enforcement agencies for legitimate law enforcement purposes consistent with this procedure upon the express permission of the Chief of Police or authorized designee. Information may also be disseminated to comply with a court related request or subpoena.

401.4 PROHIBITED USAGE

Specifically prohibited uses of the LPR system, active LPR data, historical LPR data, and hot lists include, but are not limited to the following:

- (a) To record plates on vehicles on private property that are not exposed to public view;
- (b) To harass or intimidate any person/group;
- (c) For personal use;
- (d) Solely on the basis of a protected characteristic. Protected characteristics that are an impermissible basis for LPR use include: a person's race, gender, religion, political affiliation, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability, or other classification protected by law;
- (e) For the purpose of or known effect of infringing on First Amendment Rights. For example, collecting information about an individual's lawful associations, lawful political and religious affiliations or activities, etc., is improper.

Chambersburg Police Department

Supplemental Manual

License Plate Reader

- (f) Misuse or abuse of any part of the LPR system may result in:
 - 1. Criminal Prosecution
 - 2. Administrative discipline up to and including suspension in accordance with policies and procedures.

401.5 MANAGEMENT

- (a) The Department, by and through the Chief, is solely responsible for the day-to-day operation and management of the LPR System and all tasks ancillary to its operation and management. The Chief shall assign Department personnel to operate and manage the LPR system on a day-to-day basis.
- (b) The Chief or authorized designee (LPR Administrator) shall ensure that the LPR System is operated in conformity with this directive and other Department policies, procedures, rules and regulations. The Chief shall enforce this policy and shall act as the department head for all disciplinary and enforcement actions for any violations by Department personnel.
- (c) Prior to manually entering vehicle information to a hot list, members will complete the LPR Submission Form (attachment A), listing the incident number and specific reason(s) for the entry to receive supervisor approval for the submission. Supervisors will have 24 hours to approve or disapprove a submission.
- (d) Upon supervisor approval, Department members can manually add license plates to LPR hot lists by going to the designated file location (learn-nvls.com) and entering complete license plate information, the reason for the entry, an incident number, any pertinent information (i.e. officer safety issues), and contact information.
- (e) Members who add license plates to the hot list will be responsible for removal of the information when it is no longer needed.
- (f) The Chief may designate someone to oversee a Covert Hot List. This person will be responsible for updating and maintaining the covert hot list in a consistent and timely manner.
- (g) Login/Logout Procedure. To ensure proper operation and facilitate oversight of the LPR System, all users will be required to have individual training and credentials for access and use of the systems and/or data.
- (h) All users driving a police vehicle, equipped with mounted LPR cameras, will ensure that they properly log into the LPR System and that the cameras are operational and on, at the beginning of each shift. If any malfunction is observed, at the beginning or during your tour of duty, notify the on duty supervisor immediately.
- (i) Auditing and Oversight. To ensure proper oversight into the use of the LPR system and adherence to this directive, all activities (plate detections, queries, reports, etc) are automatically recorded by the system for auditing purposes. Quarterly, audits will be conducted of the general access hot lists and the covert hot list to ensure they are up to date. Manual entries remaining in the system in excess of 90 days will be deleted unless otherwise noted.

License Plate Reader

401.6 DATABASE ACCESS AND PRIVACY CONCERNS

The LPR system database and software resides in a data center featuring full redundancy and access controls. The data remains property of the Agency and is managed according to this directive.

The LPR system is governed by the Permitted/Impermissible Uses as outlined in this directive.

The LPR data contains no Personally Identifiable Information (PII) that may be used to connect a license plate detection to an individual. It is only permissible purpose that an investigator may make this connection (using other systems) and this access is already governed by the Federal Driver's Privacy Protection Act (DPPA).

All investigative queries into collected LPR Data are logged by user and available for auditing and reviewed by the Department as outlined in this Policy.

401.7 INFORMATION STORAGE / DATA RETENTION

The retention period for all scanned data will be 10 years to allow access, per conditions outlined in this directive as well at the Federal DPPA, to this data for assistance in major crimes investigations and to align with statutes of limitations of some of these major crimes.

401.8 OPERATIONS

- (a) Installation and Functioning. The LPR Cameras will be mounted on a marked cruiser, unmarked vehicle and/or in a stationary location. The LPR equipment will passively read the license plates of moving or parked motor vehicles using the LPR optical character recognition technology and compare them against various hot lists uploaded or created by the Police Department. Scanned data files collected by the system will, on an ongoing basis, be automatically uploaded from the LPR camera to the Department's LPR database.
- (b) Hot Lists. Designation of hot lists to be utilized by the LPR System shall be made by the Chief of Police or authorized designee. Hot lists shall be obtained or compiled from sources as may be consistent with the purposes of the LPR system set forth in the directive. These sources may include the following:
 - NCIC stolen license plates or license plate numbers of stolen vehicles, as available;
 - NCIC vehicles associated with Wanted persons or registered sex offenders, as available;
 - NCIC vehicles associated with missing/endangered persons or AMBER/SILVER alerts;
 - NCIC vehicles associated with Supervised Release (Federal Probationers), as available;
 - NCIC nationwide Domestic Violence Protection Orders, as available;
 - NCIC violent gang and terrorist files, as available;

Chambersburg Police Department

Supplemental Manual

License Plate Reader

- DMV records / vehicles associated with suspended, revoked, expired or barred Registration/Drivers;
 - Vehicles associated with active criminal investigations;
 - Department generated Hot list(s) or manual entries of license plate numbers to existing hot list(s) created for purposes consistent with this directive;
 - Any additional databases utilized may be authorized by the Chief of Police, consistent with this directive.
- (c) Required steps preliminary to Police Action. Hot Lists utilized by the Department's LPR system may be updated by agency sources more frequently than the Department may be uploading them and the Department's LPR system may not have access to real time data. Further, there may be errors in the LPR's read of a license plate. Therefore, an alert alone shall not be a basis for police action (other than following the vehicle of interest). Prior to initiation of a stop of a vehicle or other intervention based on an alert, an officer shall undertake the following:
1. Verification of current status on hot list. An officer must receive confirmation, from someone or some system within the Department that the license plate is still stolen, wanted, or otherwise of interest before proceeding.
 2. Visual verification of license plate number. Officers shall visually verify that the license plate on the vehicle of interest matches identically with the image of the license plate number captured (read) by the LPR, including both the alphanumeric characters of the license plate and the state of issue, before proceeding with a traffic stop.
 3. Officers receiving an alert will develop independent reasonable suspicion for the stop or immediately confirm the status of the vehicle by or request verification from the Communications Center; unless compelling circumstances or officer safety issues make it unsafe to do so. In such cases, officers will confirm the status of the associated vehicle as soon as practical.
 4. Vehicle occupants may not be the subject associated with the license plate. Officers must develop a reasonable belief the operator/occupant is the person of interest included in the hot list prior to initiating a traffic stop.
- (d) Use in Connection with Serious Crimes/Incidents. The LPR should be considered to conduct license plate canvasses in the immediate wake of any homicide, shooting, robbery, kidnapping, sexual assault or AMBER ALERT and or other major crime or incident.
- (e) Officers wishing to receive a covert e-mail alert must indicate this request upon entry to the hot list. In these cases, the officer operating the LPR will not be notified of the alert.
- (f) All enforcement action taken in response to a hit will be documented on an incident and/or supplemental report.
- (g) Copies of completed LPR Hot List Submission Forms, once approved, will be attached to the appropriate case file (i.e. Records or investigative case file) and the appropriate LPR Administrator.

Chambersburg Police Department

Supplemental Manual

License Plate Reader

- (h) Downloading hit information from the general access hot lists will be requested through The Chief of Police or authorized designee. This information will be downloaded into document form and will be treated as evidence in accordance with CPD policy.
- (i) Downloading hit information for the covert hit list will be requested through the Chief of Police or authorized designee. This information will be downloaded into document form and will be treated as evidence in accordance with CPD policy.
- (j) Officers will adhere to the Department's policy on vehicle stops.

401.9 ADMINISTRATIVE REPORTING

In accordance with this directive, the LPR Administrator and any others designated by the Chief of Police will include LPR information in the form of a report to the Chief of Police. The report should include:

- (a) The number of manual submissions and the reason for the submissions;
- (b) The number of hits;
- (c) The number of successful uses of the LPR;
- (d) Data purging information;
- (e) Data dissemination information; and
- (f) Procedural compliance.

401.10 MAINTENANCE

- (a) Under no conditions will an LPR operator modify the LPR equipment or software operating system without permission from an LPR Administrator.
- (b) Damaged LPR equipment will be immediately reported to an LPR Administrator or Shift Supervisor.
- (c) Damage will be documented on a Vehicle Inventory/Repair form in accordance with CPD policy.
- (d) LPR camera lenses may be cleaned with non-alcohol/non-ammonia based glass cleaner or mild soap and water and a soft, nonabrasive cloth.
- (e) LPR camera lenses must not be scraped to clear snow or ice. Lenses must be gently warmed until clear to avoid damage.
- (f) LPR cameras must not be taken through an automatic car wash. If a vehicle is in need of a wash, the "touch-less" wash, on Orchard Dr., or the manual pressure washer may be utilized.
- (g) An LPR Administrator will be responsible for coordinating repairs with the appropriate vendor.
- (h) Anytime the LPR unit is disconnected, un-mounted, or removed from the vehicle, it will be placed in the protective storage case and secured.