

Public Report on the Use of Flock Automated License Plate Readers

The Bethlehem Police Department is committed to protecting both the safety and the constitutional rights of every member of our community. Recent public discussions have raised questions regarding our use of Flock Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs). Specifically, concerns have been raised that this technology is being used to conduct mass surveillance of our residents.

It is important that the public understands exactly what this technology is, how it is used, and, just as importantly, how it is **not** used.

The Bethlehem Police Department values transparent policies, departmental accountability, and responsible policing. This report is intended to explain our policies, safeguards, and commitment to protecting the privacy of our community.

What Are Flock Automated License Plate Readers?

Flock ALPRs are cameras designed for one specific purpose: to capture images of license plates and basic vehicle characteristics, such as:

- License plate number
- State of registration
- Vehicle make
- Vehicle model
- Vehicle color
- Date, time, and location of the camera

Unlike traditional surveillance cameras, these devices are not used to continuously monitor public activity.

Bethlehem Police Department Does NOT Use Flock Surveillance Cameras

This distinction is important. The Bethlehem Police Department does not own or operate Flock surveillance cameras. Our department only uses Flock's Automated License Plate Readers (ALPRs). Flock ALPRs are designed solely to document vehicles that pass a fixed location by recording license plate information and limited vehicle descriptors.

ALPRs Are Investigative Tools—Not Mass Surveillance

One of the concerns expressed is that ALPRs allow police to monitor everyone's movements throughout the city. That is not how the Bethlehem Police Department uses this technology.

Our ALPRs:

- Do not continuously track individuals.
- Do not identify drivers or passengers.
- Do not use facial recognition.
- Do not record conversations.
- Do not monitor protests or constitutionally protected activities.
- Do not provide live video feeds of neighborhoods.
- Do not create a database of residents' daily routines.

Instead, they provide investigators with information about vehicles that have already traveled past a fixed location. The overwhelming majority of vehicles captured by an ALPR are never reviewed by an officer before the data is automatically purged from the system. This occurs on a seven-day basis.

Why the Department Uses ALPRs

In many criminal investigations, time is one of the most critical factors in determining whether a case is solved. Witness memories fade, surveillance footage is overwritten, stolen vehicles are moved, and suspects leave the area quickly. Vehicle information is often one of the most valuable pieces of evidence available during criminal investigations. ALPR technology enables investigators to rapidly identify investigative leads by determining whether a vehicle associated with a crime was in the area before, during, or after an incident. Information that once required detectives to manually review hours of surveillance footage or canvass numerous businesses can often be obtained within minutes, allowing investigators to focus their efforts more efficiently and increasing the likelihood of identifying offenders.

ALPRs have helped our officers investigate crimes involving:

- Homicides
- Shootings
- Robberies
- Vehicle thefts
- Fatal vehicular crashes
- Hit-and-run crashes
- Missing and endangered persons
- Child abductions
- Wanted violent offenders

Rather than conducting broad searches, investigators generally query the system only after a crime has occurred or when attempting to locate a vehicle associated with a known public safety threat. This technology often allows investigators to develop leads in minutes that previously could have taken days or even weeks. Those time savings are not simply a matter of convenience; they can be the difference between identifying a suspect while evidence is still available or losing valuable investigative opportunities altogether. ALPRs provide detectives and patrol officers with timely, objective information that helps move investigations forward more

quickly while allowing limited personnel to focus on the investigative work that requires human judgment and decision-making.

ALPRs Are a Force Multiplier

Automated License Plate Readers serve as a force multiplier by allowing officers and investigators to work more efficiently. Rather than spending hours manually searching for surveillance footage, conducting extensive neighborhood canvasses, or attempting to locate vehicles through traditional investigative methods alone, ALPR technology can quickly identify valuable investigative leads. This allows officers to dedicate more time to interviewing witnesses, collecting evidence, assisting victims, and responding to calls for service.

The Bethlehem Police Department has successfully utilized Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) data in numerous complex, resource-intensive criminal investigations. For example, in 2025, ALPR data helped detectives identify the vehicles used by suspects fleeing the scene of a shooting at Sizzling Bites. By combining ALPR information with investigative efforts, detectives were able to quickly identify and apprehend the individuals responsible.

Also in 2025, detectives used ALPR data during the investigation of a shooting into an occupied structure. The ALPR system placed the suspect's vehicle in the area immediately prior to the incident, providing valuable evidence that supported the investigation. In 2026, patrol officers successfully located a missing person after receiving information from one of the department's ALPR cameras. Additionally, last year officers used ALPR data to locate and arrest juveniles within the City of Bethlehem who were in possession of a handgun after committing an armed robbery in the City of Allentown. These are just a handful of examples of how ALPRs have aided our department in protecting our community.

Perhaps the most compelling example of the value of ALPR technology to a Bethlehem Police Department investigation is the 2018 murder of Tyrell Holmes, who was brutally stabbed and then set on fire by individuals he considered friends. The investigation and subsequent successful prosecution relied heavily on ALPR data. The technology corroborated critical witness testimony, disproved false statements made by the defendants, and documented one defendant's travel to and from the murder scene. ALPR evidence proved instrumental in establishing the timeline of events and strengthening the overall case successfully presented to the court.

ALPR technology does not replace police officers or investigative work. Instead, it enhances their effectiveness by providing timely information that supports informed investigative decisions. Responsible use of technology enables the department to maintain a high level of public safety despite staffing challenges while ensuring that officers remain available to respond to the community's needs.

Privacy Protections

The Bethlehem Police Department recognizes that any technology capable of collecting information must be used responsibly. Accordingly, our ALPR program includes multiple safeguards. Only trained and authorized personnel may access the ALPR system. Additionally, every search conducted within the system is logged and attributable to an individual user.

The system maintains audit records documenting:

- Who conducted a search
- When the search occurred
- What information was queried
- Why the search was conducted

These records provide departmental accountability and help ensure the technology is used appropriately. Furthermore, Officers may only access ALPR information for legitimate law enforcement or public safety purposes. The police administration monitors and provides strict oversight of ALPR logs. Improper use is prohibited and may result in disciplinary action or termination.

Limited Information Collected

The system records vehicle information, not personal information.

An ALPR does not identify:

- Who owns the vehicle
- Who was driving
- Who was inside the vehicle

License plate information alone does not reveal an individual's identity without additional investigative steps and lawful access to motor vehicle records.

Data Sharing

Questions have also been raised about whether the Bethlehem Police Department shares ALPR data with other agencies. The department shares information only in accordance with applicable law and department policy. Access is limited to authorized criminal justice agencies for legitimate public safety and investigative purposes. The Bethlehem Police Department does **not** provide unrestricted public access to ALPR data, nor is the system used to monitor the everyday travel of our residents.

Accountability

Technology should strengthen public safety without compromising public trust.

To ensure responsible use, the Bethlehem Police Department maintains a publicly available policy governing:

- Authorized users
- Appropriate investigative use
- Access controls
- Audit requirements
- Data retention
- Supervisory oversight

As stated in Police Directive 3.18.1 Automated License Plate Readers, department personnel who misuse the system are subject to discipline and any other applicable legal consequences.

Commitment to the Community

The Bethlehem Police Department understands that new technologies often generate important questions about privacy and civil liberties. Those questions deserve thoughtful and transparent answers.

Our goal is not to monitor the daily lives of our residents. Our goal is to solve crimes, recover stolen vehicles, locate missing persons, apprehend dangerous offenders, and improve public safety using lawful, accountable investigative tools. Simply put, these cameras are not intended to watch people, they are intended to generate investigative leads when crimes occur.

Without access to ALPR technology, investigators would lose one of the most effective tools available for rapidly identifying suspect vehicles, corroborating investigative information, locating missing persons, and developing leads. Investigations that can now be advanced in minutes could instead require days of manual investigative work, delaying the identification of suspects and reducing the likelihood of recovering evidence or preventing additional crimes. The department believes that responsible use of ALPR technology enhances public safety while respecting the privacy and constitutional rights of our community.

Looking Forward

The Bethlehem Police Department remains committed to transparent policies regarding the use of emerging technologies so that we can provide the highest level of police services to our community. We will continue to evaluate our policies, maintain strong privacy protections, and

ensure that our use of ALPR technology reflects both our public safety mission and our community's expectations.

As policing continues to evolve, responsible technology will remain an essential component of effective law enforcement. When used within clearly defined policies and with appropriate oversight, ALPRs improve investigative efficiency, help solve crimes more quickly, and make the best use of limited public safety resources. This technology serves as an important force multiplier that enhances, not replaces, the work performed by our officers and detectives every day.

The Bethlehem Police Department believes our residents should expect both effective crime fighting and strong privacy protections. We are committed to providing both. Public trust is earned through openness, accountability, and responsible policing, and we remain committed to using technology in a manner that strengthens public safety while respecting the constitutional rights of everyone we serve.

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