General Order

Houston Police Department

ISSUE DATE:	NO.
August 27, 2024	400-29

REFERENCE: Supersedes all prior conflicting Circulars and Directives, and General Order 400-29, dated April 9, 2015

SUBJECT: AUTOMATED LICENSE PLATE RECOGNITION

POLICY

An automated license plate recognition (ALPR) system is an information technology system with the capability to quickly scan vehicle license plates and compare the information to a database for possible matches. ALPR systems provide a valuable tool for enhancing public safety through the rapid identification of stolen vehicles and vehicles associated with criminal activity or missing persons.

This General Order applies to all employees.

DEFINITIONS

ALPR Equipment. A device that captures information visible on the license plate of vehicles, whether owned and/or maintained by the department or a third party, including:

1. ***Fixed.*** ALPR cameras permanently affixed to a structure (e.g., pole, traffic barrier, bridge).

2. ***Mobile.*** ALPR cameras permanently or temporarily affixed to a vehicle.

3. ***Portable.*** ALPR cameras temporarily affixed to a structure or object.

ALPR Hit. A match between a scan of a license plate number of a vehicle by an ALPR system and a license plate number on a hot list.

ALPR Manager. A classified employee designated by the Chief of Police who is responsible for the administration and management of the ALPR program, including oversight of the department's use of the ALPR systems and ALPR stored data, as well as problem resolution, training, repair, and other aspects of the ALPR programs and related systems.

ALPR Stored Data. Any information captured by ALPR equipment and stored in an ALPR system, including but not limited to the recorded image(s) of a scanned license plate and optical character recognition data, global positioning system (GPS) data or other location information, and the date and time of the scan.

ALPR System. Technology that uses software and computers to automatically interpret information derived from ALPR equipment.

ALPR User. An employee who has received approved training in the use of the ALPR systems.

Hot List. License plate information of vehicles of interest (e.g., stolen or wanted vehicles) that have been entered into an ALPR system.

1 TECHNICAL OPERATIONS GROUP RESPONSIBILITIES

The Gang Division's Technical Operations Group, consisting of the ALPR manager and designated administrators, shall have the following responsibilities:

a. Oversee integration of the ALPR systems into day-to-day police activities of the department's patrol and investigative functions.

b. Determine protocols for access and any restrictions for use of the ALPR systems.

c. Oversee the use of ALPR system resources and ALPR stored data.

d. Validate training for ALPR users and ensure all training is documented.

e. Develop deployment plans to determine placement of fixed ALPR equipment, when owned by the City or when owned by another party that requests the department's input on placement.

f. Deploy, manage, and maintain fixed and portable ALPR equipment, other than those managed by the Highway Interdiction Unit, and coordinate the management or use of such devices.

g. Recommend policy changes to the Executive Staff and act as subject matter experts on ALPR systems.

h. Designate employees not assigned to the Technical Operations Group as backup administrators.

The ALPR manager shall ensure compliance with records retention requirements, ensure compliance with ALPR stored data extension requests, facilitate responses to open records requests for ALPR stored data, manage compilation of hot lists, ensure all maintenance and repair of the ALPR system is completed, and designate trained personnel to regularly check equipment to ensure functionality and camera alignment.

The ALPR manager (or designee) shall complete a semi-annual audit of a random sampling of ALPR transactions pursuant to divisional standard operating procedures. The ALPR manager shall forward a report of findings to the Office of Planning & Data Governance.

2 USAGE GUIDELINES

Prior to using an ALPR system for operational or analytical purposes, each employee shall obtain approved training. The department uses multiple ALPR systems, each of which requires training specific to that system. Employees may obtain more information about required training on the Intranet Portal or by contacting the ALPR manager.

Pursuant to General Order 400-13, **Acceptable Use of Computer Systems**, employees shall use the ALPR system and data generated or stored by the ALPR system only for bona fide criminal investigations. Employees shall share information among criminal justice agencies in accordance with existing memorandums of understanding with those agencies and/or within existing policies (e.g., General Order 800-06, **CJIS Compliance**).

An employee shall not share any information derived from any ALPR system with non-authorized persons. An ALPR user shall only use ALPR systems for criminal investigations and shall not use the ALPR system for personal, civil, or administrative purposes. An employee who misuses an ALPR system or associated database or data may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including indefinite suspension.

Any employee who wants to inform the Technical Operations Group of their successful use of an ALPR system should email a synopsis of the incident to TechOps@houstonpolice.org.

ALPR Hits

An ALPR user may set up criteria or use default criteria to receive alerts from any ALPR system to notify the user of an ALPR hit. An ALPR user may share information about an ALPR hit with other law enforcement personnel.

An officer shall not consider an ALPR hit, by itself, as reasonable suspicion for detention or probable cause for arrest until the officer has properly confirmed the alert or hit for accuracy. The officer shall consider information received through the ALPR system in conjunction with other information about the circumstances of an offense before deciding to detain or arrest. This provision does not restrict or prohibit the officer from taking appropriate police action based on facts or reasons the officer obtained independently from the ALPR hit.

Upon receiving an ALPR hit, the ALPR user shall, to the extent possible:

a. Confirm the ALPR hit by visually verifying the vehicle license plate number to match it to the license plate number read by the ALPR system, including both the state of issuance and alphanumeric characters (i.e., numbers and letters).

b. Ascertain information about the person named in a warrant via dispatch or mobile computing device (MCD) query.

c. Verify the current status of the license plate through the dispatcher or via MCD.

d. If confirmed, notify the dispatcher and a supervisor of the confirmed ALPR hit over the air.

An officer should not broadcast information obtained from an ALPR hit over the air until the officer has confirmed the information. The officer shall not broadcast over the air the location (e.g., intersection, address) of any ALPR equipment that provided an ALPR hit.

Once an ALPR user has confirmed the ALPR hit and notified the dispatcher and a supervisor, the ALPR user shall take appropriate action in accordance with training and department policy, including but not limited to General Orders 600-04, **Motor Vehicle Pursuits**, and 600-34, **High-Risk Vehicle Approaches**. Unless extenuating circumstances exist, an officer responding to an ALPR hit (including a backup unit) shall respond priority three to avoid alerting the suspect during the period prior to action.

When an officer takes police action resulting from an ALPR alert or hit, including but not limited to a vehicle stop, the ALPR user shall provide a disposition (e.g., arrest made, vehicle recovered) in the notes section of the ALPR system that provided the ALPR hit, if possible.

When an officer recovers a stolen vehicle or makes an arrest or citation following an ALPR hit, the officer shall document the involvement of the ALPR system on their work card. When documenting the ALPR hit in the incident report and/or charges, the officer shall not detail the location (e.g., intersection, address) of any ALPR equipment that provided an ALPR hit. The officer shall complete an incident report or supplement if required by General Order 800-07, **Completion of Incident Reports**.

Usage of Mobile ALPR Equipment

When using mobile ALPR equipment, the ALPR user shall activate and leave the equipment operational while patrolling throughout the duration of their shift. The ALPR user may minimize the screen in the background and the system will remain operational.

An ALPR user shall visually inspect the mobile ALPR camera each day to ensure the lenses are clear and the camera has not been altered. The ALPR user may clean the mobile ALPR camera lenses with an approved lens cleaner and a soft, non-abrasive cloth. The ALPR user shall not attempt to adjust the mobile ALPR cameras nor attempt to repair any portion of the mobile ALPR equipment. The ALPR user shall immediately advise an appropriate supervisor of any malfunctioning or damaged mobile ALPR equipment. The supervisor shall follow the procedures contained in General Orders 400-14, **Control of Police Department Property**, and 400-18, **Responsibility for City Property**. The supervisor shall also immediately notify the ALPR manager at TechOps@houstonpolice.org of the malfunctioning or damaged equipment.

Each division that is allocated mobile ALPR equipment shall maintain the equipment. If repairs are needed, the division shall take the vehicle with malfunctioning ALPR equipment to the Office of Technology Services' Mobile Technology Services for technicians to evaluate issues related to the equipment problems. An employee shall not modify mobile ALPR equipment without approval from the ALPR manager.

3 HOT LISTS

An ALPR user may create a hot list entry (i.e., manual entry of license plate information) in the relevant ALPR system database(s) in the following circumstances:

a. License plate information is reasonably associated with a missing person (e.g., Amber Alert, Silver Alert).

b. License plate information is reasonably associated with criminal activity that is in progress or that has just occurred (e.g., robbery, kidnapping, homicide).

c. License plate information is reasonably associated with an ongoing investigation that meets the criteria contained in Section 2, *Usage Guidelines*.

Submission

When submitting a hot list entry in the relevant ALPR system database(s), the ALPR user shall:

a. Enter the beginning date and time.

b. Enter the ending date and time, which shall not be longer than 14 days.

c. Include the full license plate number and state, the color, year, make, and model of the flagged vehicle.

d. Include the associated incident report and agency (e.g., 1234567-24/Houston Police).

e. Include the purpose for the entry.

f. Include their contact information, if entered for investigative purposes.

g. Activate hot list deconfliction notices on applicable ALPR systems.

The ALPR user shall not submit a hot list entry without submission of each of the items of information above.

Unless approved by the ALPR manager (or designee), an ALPR user shall not create a hot list entry of a partial or cloned license plate in an ALPR system, due to the risk of incorrect identification.

When an officer makes contact with a vehicle on the hot list, the officer shall notify the ALPR user who created the hot list entry, regardless of agency. Unless the investigation is ongoing, the ALPR user who created the hot list entry shall remove the hot list entry from all ALPR systems and provide a disposition within the ALPR system.

Harris County Toll Road Authority Alert Plates Entry

An officer with a complete license plate may use the Harris County Toll Road Authority (HCTRA) ALPR system to identify vehicles associated with alert types listed on the *HCTRA Alert Plates Entry* form, available on the Intranet Portal. The officer shall complete and sign the form and send it to HCTRA.

When an officer becomes aware that a vehicle listed in the HCTRA ALPR system is no longer wanted, the officer shall immediately call the HCTRA dispatcher to have the license plate number removed from the system.

The officer requesting an HCTRA ALPR entry or removal shall document the request in the incident report or supplement.

4 RETENTION OF STORED DATA

The Office of Technology Services (OTS) shall ensure all ALPR stored data generated by City-owned devices is maintained on an approved secure database. OTS shall ensure that all such ALPR stored data is automatically purged after one calendar year unless a concerned division requests a longer retention period for a specific case.

If ALPR stored data is evidence in a criminal investigation or prosecution, whether said data is derived from City-owned devices or other ALPR systems, the investigator shall electronically

retain the stored data as evidentiary property pursuant to General Order 700-01, **Property and Evidence Control Regulations**.

The ALPR manager shall instruct the administrators of non-City-owned ALPR systems to automatically purge such data within one calendar year of entry unless a law enforcement agency requests a longer retention period for a specific case.

Employees shall refer any outside entity, other than a criminal justice agency, requesting information about ALPR stored data to the Office of Community Affairs. Employees shall refer a criminal justice agency seeking a memorandum of understanding to the Office of Legal Services.

5 REFERENCE MATERIAL

Chapter 707 of the Texas Transportation Code
Title 18, United States Code, Chapter 123

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Chief of Police