



Falls Church Police Department Automatic License Plate Reader FAQ

Q1: What is Automatic License Plate Reader (ALPR) technology?

ALPR software reads the license plate of a vehicle that is visible to the ALPR camera, then compares it with a state-maintained criminal justice database of license plates for stolen vehicles, wanted, missing, or endangered persons, or persons associated with human trafficking. ALPR systems temporarily store records of observed license plates for use in criminal investigations.

Q2: How does the Falls Church Police Department (FCPD) use ALPR?

FCPD uses police vehicle mounted ALPR to quickly locate critically missing or endangered people, wanted people who may pose a threat to public safety, and recover stolen vehicles and property. Authorized Department personnel may also conduct a query of ALPR records as part of a specific criminal investigation.

Q3: Does the Falls Church Police Department use Flock Safety cameras?

No, the City of Falls Church is one of very few localities that has never used or deployed Flock cameras and the Police Department has no plans to do so. The vendor for FCPD's ALPR system is Axon.

Q4: Is FCPD using fixed ALPR readers?

No. FCPD has no fixed or pole mounted ALPR cameras in our city. FCPD's ALPR system is only used with the existing In-Car Camera ("dash cams") that are already installed in FCPD vehicles. The photographs below show these Axon cameras installed inside a police vehicle



Q5: Is ALPR a new technology for FCPD?

No, FCPD has used ALPR systems for over a decade. The Department's current ALPR system is incorporated within the In-Car Cameras ("dash cams") installed on fifteen of the Police Department's vehicles, and is only operational when the car is running. This system uses the most current ALPR technology and prioritizes privacy and accountability in line with best practices and state-mandated legal requirements.

Q6: Are there legal restrictions on FCPD's use of ALPR?

Yes. Virginia State law (Va. Code § 2.2-5517) specifies how ALPR data may be used, shared, and retained. The law mandates written policy, training, retention limits, and has stringent audit, reporting, and transparency requirements.

Q7: Does FCPD have an ALPR policy?

Yes. ALPR use is governed by [FCPD General Order 427](#), which is publicly available on the Police Department website along with other policies.

Q8: When will the ALPR notify or "hit" on a license plate?

Consistent with Virginia law, the system will only notify officers if they pass a license plate that is associated with a missing or endangered person, a person with an outstanding judicial warrant, a stolen car, a stolen license plate, or a person associated with human trafficking.

Q9: Does an ALPR notification or "hit" allow an officer to make a traffic stop or an arrest?

No. An ALPR notification alone does not provide officers with reasonable suspicion or probable cause to make a stop or an arrest. Officers must independently verify that a legal basis exists to take any enforcement actions.

Q10: Does the system notify officers when passing a car with expired registration, improper license and insurance status, outstanding fines and fees, or civil violations?

No.

Q11: Who may conduct a search of stored ALPR data, and when may they do so?

Only designated FCPD officers are authorized to query the ALPR system and only as part of an investigation into a specific violation of state or local law. Regular audits by supervisors and Command Staff monitor compliance with these policies, and officers violating them may be subject to both internal disciplinary action and criminal charges under Va. Code § 2.2-5517(N).

Q12: Is anyone outside of FCPD notified when an ALPR reads a license plate?

No. FCPD owns its ALPR data and it is illegal for the Department to share its data with unauthorized individuals or agencies. Our data is not pooled into a searchable cross-jurisdictional database. The data remains local within Falls Church Police Department.

Q13: Does FCPD integrate ALPR data with private companies?

No. While our ALPR provider, Axon, stores data on their servers, the data is the property of FCPD and cannot be shared or disseminated without FCPD permission or a valid court order. FCPD's ALPR program does not integrate with any outside or private ALPR systems.

Q14: Does FCPD allow other law enforcement agencies to access ALPR data?

No. Other law enforcement agencies do not have access to FCPD's ALPR data. Specific information may be shared based on an individualized request from another Virginia law enforcement agency, or pursuant to a court order. The FCPD ALPR data is not searchable by anyone other than FCPD-authorized personnel. All searches must meet legal and policy requirements and are audited regularly.

Q15: Does FCPD share ALPR data with any federal or out-of-state law enforcement agencies?

No. Sharing of data with agencies other than Virginia law enforcement agencies is prohibited by state law, unless required by a court order. Requests from Virginia law enforcement agencies are scrutinized to ensure legal and policy requirements have been met.

Q16: Is FCPD's ALPR data used for civil immigration enforcement?

Absolutely not. Such use is explicitly prohibited by Virginia law.

Q17: Is ALPR data subject to public disclosure?

Va. Code § 2.2-5517(F) specifically states that ALPR data may not be disclosed under the Virginia Freedom of Information Act. However, aggregate data and statistics about the use of the ALPR system will be publicly posted by the department as required by Va. Code § 2.2-5517(K).

Q18: What data privacy safeguards exist?

All ALPR data is deleted after 21 days, unless it is evidence for a specific criminal investigation or is retained pursuant to a court order. All searches and queries of ALPR data are recorded, and an internal audit of all queries is conducted every 30 days.