Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR)

Purpose

The purpose of this Training Bulletin is to familiarize personnel with the operation of the Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) system and establish procedures for its use.

Introduction

The Automated License Plate Recognition system, known as the ALPR, consists of a mobile computer and two cameras mounted to a police vehicle. When activated, the cameras scan roadways and parking lots for vehicle license plates. The system automatically reads those license plates that come within camera view of the system. It then compares the scanned license plates to the various databases maintained by the local law enforcement agency.

Databases may contain plates of stolen vehicles, wanted felony vehicles, vehicles with lost or stolen plates, vehicles wanted for certain crimes, missing persons, Amber Alerts or any other lawful purpose. Any crime, where a license plate has been identified, may be entered into the system.

ALPR technology provides a manner in which vehicle license plates can be automatically scanned by a computer from a moving vehicle or a fixed location. If a license plate matches a license plate in one of the databases, the system will alert the officer with both an audible and visible alert. Images of the license plate and vehicle as well as a brief explanation of what the vehicle is wanted for will be displayed on a computer screen. The entire process is automatic and takes less than a second. This allows the ALPR to read literally hundreds of license plates an hour.

I. Guidelines for Use

The Santa Ana Police Department has acquired two ALPR systems. The District Investigations Auto Theft Detail will provide mandatory training to all personnel prior to their using the ALPR system. One system is assigned to the Auto Theft Detail while the Traffic Division maintains the second.

The ALPR system consists of a laptop computer permanently attached to a docking port, a power cord plug, a GPS antenna, two cameras, two camera mounts and two cables to connect the cameras to the laptop computer.
Prior to activating the system for field service, the user should download the most current databases onto the ALPR computer. The databases are maintained on a dedicated desktop computer that accesses the Stolen Vehicle System. The computer is maintained by the Auto Theft Detail and is located in the District Investigations Section. After the ALPR databases are uploaded and transferred onto the laptop computer, the unit is ready for use.

The ALPR system will not read all license plates. The system only reads plates that come into the view of the camera and are within the infrared color spectrum. The camera cannot read license plates that do not have reflective characteristics. Older, blue California plates and extremely dirty, mutilated or obscured plates may not be readable as well as some out of state and motorcycle plates. All license plates must be visually verified when an alert is activated before any action can be taken.

II. Officer Responsibilities

When the ALPR system identifies a wanted vehicle, officers must visually verify the license plate on the vehicle and confirm its wanted status through CLETS. The databases are not in real-time and the system may misread license plates. Confirmation through CLETS is necessary to ensure that the vehicle is still wanted and the plate was read properly.

If an arrest or recovery is made as a result of the ALPR system the officer shall forward that information to the Auto Theft Sergeant (Program Administrator) prior to the end of watch for tracking purposes.

At the end of the officer’s shift, ALPR users should disconnect the GPS antenna, download the day’s activities and return the equipment to the appropriate Bureau. Any questions should be referred to the Auto Theft Detail at 245-8404.

III. Pursuits

The ALPR system is a mobile system and not permanently affixed to any one unit. The cameras are mounted via magnets, which are rated for 105 mph and could be dislodged as a result of sudden jarring or impact. The APLR vehicle is discouraged from being the primary unit in a pursuit.

ALPR equipped units are governed by the Santa Ana Police Department’s pursuit policy, D.O. 315, but shall also adhere to the following:

1. The vehicle operator shall notify dispatch that they are in an ALPR/dual-purpose vehicle.
2. The vehicle operator should request a marked black and white police vehicle to respond to take over the pursuit as soon as practical.
3. ALPR/dual-purpose vehicles may be allowed to continue in a pursuit or assist in a pursuit only when approved to do so by a supervisor.

IV. Supervisor Responsibilities
Supervisors shall consider the totality of the circumstances in addition to the department's pursuit policy when approving ALPR/dual-purpose vehicles to engage in, assist, or remain in a pursuit.

**Summary**

ALPR technology revolutionizes how Santa Ana police officers can search for wanted vehicles. The technology allows officers to run hundreds of plates within a short time thereby increasing the chances of locating a wanted vehicle within a limited time span. Officers are no longer limited to manually entering each license plate into a mobile data terminal or calling the plates into the dispatcher.

The ALPR Systems were funded by the FY2005 Urban Area Security Initiative whose purpose is to assist all first responders prepare, respond, and recover from acts of terrorism. The ALPR Systems are a regional (county wide) asset assigned to the Santa Ana Police Department. The Santa Ana Police Department’s systems custodian will determine whether a request from an outside agency to use the ALPR is justified. Any questions regarding the loaning of the systems should be directed to the UASI Logistics Coordinator of the department’s Homeland Security Division.

**Acknowledgment:**

*Researched and prepared by:* Cpl. Carol Leiva #2628

*Publish Date:* October 2007