

WPost Urges Caution On Use Of License Plate Surveillance. The Washington Post (12/2, 553K) editorializes that "a growing number of 'license plate readers' throughout the Washington area scan and digitally store the license plate numbers of vehicles, parked and moving alike," but "few rules govern this powerful and potentially invasive tool." The Post notes that the International Association of Chiefs of Police has "made several sensible recommendations. Among them: conducting regular audits to ensure that information is being used appropriately and restricting access to the data to limit the opportunity for misuse." The Post adds that confidence in the way this information is collected "is best achieved through law enforcement transparency and a public debate about the standards that should govern this tool."

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Police Increasingly Rely On License Plate Readers To Pick Up Stolen Cars. USA Today (12/28, 1.78M) reports, "License plate readers pick up more stolen cars than cops alone, but police units specializing in auto-theft deter car thieves even better, finds an experiment in Arizona." According to study, "the license plate readers did pick up 2.7 times more stolen plates than the routine patrols, and scanned 8 times more plates in general than manual plate-checking." The study also found that "only the patrol areas where the specialized auto-theft unit had been making manual checks saw a continuing decline in car thefts two weeks after the LPR experiment stopped," suggesting "that specialized auto-theft units busily checking plates caught the attention of thieves more than patrols swinging by and letting cameras do the work."

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License Plate Readers Aid Police But Raise Privacy Concerns. The Washington Post (11/20, Klein, White, 572K, 553K) reports, "With virtually no public debate, police agencies have begun storing the information from [license plate readers], building databases that document the travels of millions of vehicles. Nowhere is that more prevalent than in the District, which has more than one plate-reader per square mile, the highest concentration in the nation. ... Police departments are grappling with how long to store the information and how to balance privacy concerns against the value the data provide to investigators." Law enforcement officials hail the license plate cameras for their use in both investigating and preventing crime.

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US To Tap Canadian Radar In Bid To Combat Drug Smuggling. The AP (5/17) reports New York Sen. Charles Schumer "says Homeland Security will begin tapping into Canadian military radar later this year to detect low-flying aircraft used to smuggle drugs from Canada into the United States." Schumer "chaired a hearing of the subcommittee on Immigration, Refugees and Border Security in Washington" yesterday. "Afterward, he told reporters the Department of Homeland Security will begin integrating the Canadian radar feeds by November."

CBP Commissioner Alan Bersin "said 22 military radar facilities operated by Canada will be combined with the radar the US military and the Federal Aviation Administration use to track low-flying aircraft crossing the border illegally," the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle (5/18, Tumulty, 130K) reports. "We have a longstanding relationship," Bersin said at the Senate hearing. "He noted that the US and Canada have jointly operated the North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD) for decades."

"The ability of small aircraft to enter the United States undetected presents a multi-faceted threat," Bersin said, the Canadian Press (5/18, Goodman, 88K) reports. "For months, senators have been badgering Janet Napolitano, Homeland Security secretary, to increase surveillance efforts along the border due to an escalating problem of drug smuggling via low-flying aircraft," the Canadian Press reports. The Montreal Gazette (5/18, Alberts, 454K), Toronto Sun (5/17, Murphy), and CBC (5/18) also noted the agreement.

Bersin To Examine Expedited Rail, Truck Screening Across Northern Border. The Albany (NY) Times Union (5/18, Freedman) reports CBP Commissioner Alan Bersin "said Tuesday that he would work to speed up train and truck traffic crossing into the US from Canada, which is often delayed by lengthy inspections for drugs and other contraband." At a Senate hearing yesterday, "Bersin said he would work with Amtrak to examine the feasibility of pre-screening US-bound railroad passengers in Montreal. Amtrak's Adirondack passenger train, which runs between Montreal, Albany and New York City, is routinely stopped at the border for inspections that take up to two hours."

NTEU President Calls For More Port Staffing. The Federal Times (5/18, Medici, 40K) reports, "Recent increases in the number of Customs and Border Protection officers at the nation's land ports of entry are 'woefully short of critical need,' according to the union president that represents those officers. Border crossing stations in Vermont have made no new hires in more than two years, and 10 percent fewer CBP officers are processing about 20 percent more traffic, Colleen Kelley, president of the National Treasury Employees Union, told the Senate Judiciary border security subcommittee on Tuesday."

Bersin Pressed On Flow Of Guns, Money Into Mexico. The Houston Chronicle's (5/18, Freedman) "Texas on the Potomac" blog reported at the a Senate hearing yesterday, Sen. John Cornyn pressed CBP Commissioner Alan Bersin on the deployment of license plate readers at border checks leading to Mexico and Canada, citing the flow of guns and cash across the nation's borders. "In response to Cornyn's questioning...Bersin said he could not offer a definite timeline for when all lanes would have these readers. Infrastructure on some lanes leading into ports of entry make it difficult to place readers in a position to read license plates. 'Southbound inspections are a critical dimension of our work in ways that were not true in the past,' he said. Customs and Border Protection is cooperating with other law enforcement agencies to get the inspections done, 'but we have a lot more work to do,' he added."

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New Surveillance Technology Monitors Highways For Violators. The CBS Evening News (6/22, story 9, 2:45, Pelley, 6.1M) reported, "Police officers across the country have an amazing new surveillance technology that you may not have heard of but chances are you'll run across it soon enough." CBS (Orr) added, "On Maryland Highway 200, Officer Yancy Anthony patrols with two extra sets of eyes. Cameras mounted on his cruiser's trunk scan and photograph the license tags of passing cars, sounding alarms when possible violators are spotted. ... License readers can scan 1,800 plates a minute on cars going as fast as 150 miles an hour. ... The data are also funneled to Maryland's intelligence center which connects and monitors 367 license plate readers around the state. Assistant US Attorney Harvey Eisenberg oversees the network." Eisenberg: "Say we want to find a homicide suspect, a rape suspect whatever, you put that into the systems, that's a vehicle you want to pay attention to."

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