

Automatic License Plate Readers

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This paper provides a brief overview on automatic license plate readers and offers some considerations for regions and states prior to approving use of Section 402 or other Federal highway safety grant funding for the equipment.

Operation

License plate reader (LPR) technology allows law enforcement officers to access license plate and related data more effectively. A plate reader can recognize over 1,000 license plates an hour, at speeds of up to 70mph, as vehicles pass either a portable or stationary unit or a law enforcement vehicle passes the plate. Information downloaded into a data base connected to the plate reader allows a law enforcement officer to monitor vehicle registrations for warrants, suspensions or other specified violations. Following individual law enforcement agency policy, the officer uses their discretion on making a traffic stop or conducting further investigation when safe to do so.

Alert Notifications

An audible alert notifies the officer that the equipment has identified the plate for a myriad of possibilities. Primary alerts/uses include, but are not limited to the identification of:

- Stolen vehicles
- Suspended/revoked registration
- Suspended/revoked operator
- Wanted individuals
- Amber alert vehicles
- Violators of passing stopped school buses
- Out-of-service motor carriers/coaches
- Scofflaws

Guidance for Funding Determination

Agencies requesting Section 402 or other Federal highway safety funds for the purchase of license plate readers shall provide the following for consideration:

- Justify Need - Why are the readers needed? What safety problem will their use serve to address/reduce? (High number of suspended/revoked motorists in the community, high number of crashes involving suspended/revoked motorists/vehicles, etc.).
- Plan for Use - What percent of time will be spent focusing on highway safety issues? (Suspended/revoked licenses, school bus safety, etc. versus use for criminal interdiction).

- Explore the possibility of joint funding with other agencies (Department of Justice, Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, etc.).
- Area of Coverage - Identify if equipment will be used for multi-jurisdictional or corridor settings.
- Plan for on-going maintenance/warranty of equipment and life-cycle replacement.
- Identify tool for reporting and evaluation (i.e. # of citations, types of citations, number of arrests, etc.).
- Establish guidelines, policies and interagency agreements prior to implementation of LPR program.

Where a State is able to show through problem identification or legitimate justification of safety potential, that use of LPR technology has a reasonable chance of improving safety performance, every consideration should be given to approving the request. The amount funded from NHTSA sources should be proportional to the highway safety benefit of the program.

Regional management should consider the totality of the safety issues and program circumstances in the State, and the nature of the safety potential to be achieved through the use of the LPR, when making a funding decision.