

**BIG
BROTHER
WATCH**

Police Use of ANPR

A Big Brother Watch Report

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Key Findings

The research covers the period 01 April 2009 - 31 March 2012

- At least **5477 ANPR cameras** are being used by police forces.
- The Force with the most cameras is **West Midlands Police**, which has **366**.
- The **Highway's Agency** operates the largest number of cameras: **1109**.
- In total Police Forces and other organisations have spent at least **£22,495,399**
- **The Police Service of Northern Ireland** has spent the most in this period, spending at least **£8,246,524** in ANPR technology.

Executive Summary

The current Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera strategy was first fully rolled out in 2006. Since then there have been serious concerns raised about its privacy implications as well as its proportionality and scope.

The number of cameras in the United Kingdom stands at 4368 and looks set to continue to rise. In 2005 Frank Whiteley, then Chief Constable of Hertfordshire Police and Head of the ANPR steering committee, said that the plan was to move from the “low thousands”¹ of cameras to the “high thousands”².

Financially there has been major investment in ANPR across the country, with forces spending a combined total of £22,495,444 in the past three years.

We believe that the use of ANPR cameras should be subject to more rigorous oversight. Cases such as the so called “ring of steel” strategy in Royston demonstrate that some forces can be over-zealous in their application of this technology. This can lead to huge invasions of privacy and to large numbers of completely innocent members of the public having every part of their journey’s tracked and recorded.

This stance is supported by the Information Commissioner’s Office (ICO). In its ruling over the Royston case it stated that the installation of ANPR cameras by police forces needed to be “fully justified”³ and that prior to any installation a “comprehensive assessment of the impact on the privacy of the public”⁴ should be carried out.

It isn’t just the way in which data is collected that creates concern; there is also the way in which it is stored to consider. The National ANPR Data Centre (NADC) holds in excess of 7 billion records, with an estimated 14.5 million being added every day⁵. Cases such as the death of Hayley Adamson show that this information can be out of date or incorrect and this can have tragic consequences.

¹ *The Independent*, 22nd December 2013: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/surveillance-uk-why-this-revolution-is-only-the-start-520396.html>

² *Ibid*

³ *ICO Press Release*, 24th July 2013: http://www.ico.org.uk/news/latest_news/2013/police-use-of-ring-of-steel-is-disproportionate-and-must-be-reviewed-24072013

⁴ *Ibid*

⁵ *The Guardian*, 28th July 2011: <http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2011/jul/28/royston-under-surveillance-police-cameras?INTCMP=SRCH>

Hayley Adamson was killed by a police car that was travelling at 94 miles per hour whilst in pursuit of a vehicle that had been flagged by the NADC. It wasn't discovered until after the driver had been apprehended that the information was in fact out of date and that it related to the previous owner of the car. There must be effective principles in place to ensure that the database can be properly used as well as the information on it securely kept.

The reliability and quality of ANPR hotlists was also highlighted in the ICO's response to the consultation on a CCTV code of practice. The responses noted that it was vital that the entire system was examined and "measures put in place to keep it up to date"⁶.

⁶ *ICO Consultation Response:*

http://www.ico.org.uk/about_us/consultations/~media/documents/library/Data_Protection/Notices/ic_response_to_home_office_consultation_surveillance_cameras_code_of_practice.ashx p. 5

Policy Recommendations

1. There should be greater transparency over what data is being collected and why.

It is unacceptable for police forces to be collecting information about the journeys of every motorist in the UK. The amount of information is clearly excessive as well as being disproportionate to the needs of the Police. There are around 7.6bn records held on the NADC, this is in comparison to the 320,391 searches that have taken place in the past three years.

2. There should be proper and accurate control of the NADC.

The cases of Hayley Adamson and Sean Robert Toombs show that there is scope for the information held on the NADC to be out of date or incorrect and that there can be tragic consequences as a result. The cases also highlight the need for those in control of the database to put in place proper safeguards to ensure that the information held on is necessary and correct.

3. A review should be conducted into the proportionality of each force's ANPR systems.

The ICO's ruling at Royston showed that in some cases the ANPR strategy can be disproportionate to the needs of the force in question. Each force should begin an immediate review into whether their ANPR cameras are also necessary and proportionate.

About ANPR

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) has been used in certain areas of the UK since the 1990s. However in 2002 a small scale pilot scheme, Project Laser, was introduced to examine the potential of enabling every police force in England and Wales to utilise the technology. The perceived success of this project led to a second pilot scheme, Project Laser 2, this time involving 23 forces. In 2006 the decision was taken to roll out the scheme nationally. Caroline Flint, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State to the Home Office, had previously called the system “hugely successful”⁷ .

The use of this type of technology is not limited to the police. Local Councils also operate ANPR cameras, as do private companies such as supermarkets and petrol stations, this is meant to reduce the number of customers who leave without paying.

How ANPR Works

Cameras can be deployed either in mobile units or in fixed positions. As a vehicle passes a camera its vehicle registration mark (VRM) is recorded along with the date, time and location. This information is then added to the NADC and is available to be searched by police officers.

If it is deemed to be important or to relate to an individual of interest to the police then it is added to a “hotlist” that will send out an alert if it appears on the system again.

Database Access

Access to the NADC is governed by a series of policies. Records which are less than 91 days old can be viewed with the authority of an Inspector, whilst any record between 91 days and a year old can only be accessed with the permission of a Superintendent. Records that have been on the database for over a year can only be accessed with the authority of a Superintendent and the enquiry must be related to Counter-Terrorism.

⁷ C. Henderson, *Driving Crime Down: Denying Criminals the Use of the Road*, p. 26

What are the benefits of ANPR?

In January 2013 the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) published *The police use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition*. The document argued that there are three main benefits. Firstly it increases the information that is available to officers to identify criminals. Secondly it allows the Police to more effectively deploy their resources to vehicles of interest. Lastly it can help improve investigations once the crimes have been committed. In addition the police argue that it can help coordinate efforts in investigations that take place across force boundaries.

What concerns exist about ANPR?

The major issues surrounding the use of ANPR involve privacy and proportionality. With a database that holds over 7 billion records there is always going to be scope for data loss or indeed unauthorised access. Perhaps even more worryingly is the potential for this network of cameras to track innocent members of the public for the duration of their journey and then store a record of it.

Accuracy

As previously noted there has been concern raised over the accuracy of the database. In one case a police chase lead to the target's, a man named Sean Robert Toombs, car setting alight and Toombs committing suicide. It was later established that the victim had been arrested and then released without further charge the previous day, however the database had not been updated to reflect this.

It is important to note that ANPR is not a fool proof system. This is shown in the case of Ashleigh Hall, who was murdered in 2009. The individual responsible was already wanted by the Police for a variety of reasons and his car had been "hot listed". In the days immediately before and after Ashleigh's disappearance his car was flagged a total of 16 times by ANPR cameras in three different force areas but he was only stopped on the final occasion. An article that appeared in the Guardian also highlighted the issue with stopping suspects. Even after they have been caught once by ANPR there is no guarantee that officers will be able to find them on the roads.

Proportionality

Recently, in the case of the ANPR strategy the ICO raised concerns about the proportionality of systems such as this. It concluded that police forces needed to consider the “privacy of the road using public”.⁸

In July 2013, the ICO ruled on a joint complaint from Big Brother Watch, Privacy International and No CCTV, concerning the use of ANPR in Royston. The ICO upheld the complaint, finding that Hertfordshire Constabulary failed to carry out “any effective assessments” and that the system was “unlawful” as it breached the Data Protection Act 1998, and that it was not justifiable for Hertfordshire Constabulary to log every vehicle passing through the town on its system.

The ICO based this decision on the basis that Hertfordshire Constabulary’s extensive use of ANPR cameras in Royston has meant that they had “effectively made it impossible for anyone to drive their car in and out of Royston without a record being kept of the journey”.⁹

⁸ ICO Press Release, 24th July 2013: http://www.ico.org.uk/news/latest_news/2013/police-use-of-ring-of-steel-is-disproportionate-and-must-be-reviewed-24072013

⁹ Information Commissioner’s Office, Police use of ‘Ring of Steel’ is disproportionate and must be reviewed http://www.ico.org.uk/news/latest_news/2013/police-use-of-ring-of-steel-is-disproportionate-and-must-be-reviewed-24072013

Table 1: Police Data – Number of Cameras and Cost of Installation

Police Force	Number of ANPR cameras	Amount spent of installation of ANPR cameras			Total Spent on ANPR
		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	
Avon and Somerset Police	116	£55,000	£83,000	£133,000	£271,000
Bedfordshire Police	93	£0	£70,235.22	£77,117.55	£147,353
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	11	£0	£0	£0	£0
Cheshire Constabulary	150		£105,000		
City of London Police	43	£0	£0	£0	£0
Cleveland Police	58 Fixed Cameras 4 Mobile Cameras	£0	£0	£0	£0
Cumbria Constabulary	Refused under s. 31 (1)	£0	£22,477	£32,842	£55,319
Derbyshire Constabulary	150	£153,260.54	£143,978.95	£182,025.42	£479,265
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	44 fixed sites and 28 mobile units	£0	£0	£0	£0
Dorset Police	88	£14,000	£15,000	£13,000	£42,000
Durham Constabulary	102	£489,743.55	£41,532.38	£125,218.31	£656,494
Dyfed Powys Police	133	£350,000	£390,000	£230,000	£970,000
Essex Police	233	£95,000	£0	£290,000	£385,000
Gloucestershire Constabulary	36 fixed sites and 25 mobile sites	£31,000	£31,000	£38,451	£100,451
Greater Manchester Police	309	Information not held			
Gwent Police	13 fixed sites and 33 vehicle units		£18,750		
Hampshire Constabulary	129	£147,186	£1,055,019	£26,824	£1,229,029

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Highways Agency	1109	Not known	Not known	Not known	£0
Humberside Police	45	£68,511	£87,610	£148,462	£304,583
Kent Police	154	£88,000	£125,000	50,000	£263,000
Lancashire Constabulary	59		£2,400,000		
Leicestershire Police	130	Refused due to time and cost: Funding for ANPR has come from a wide range of budgets within the force and there is no 'central budget' for ANPR.			
Lincolnshire Police	117	£66,000	£0	£73,000	£66,000
Merseyside Police	88	0	0	£269,000	£269,000
Metropolitan Police	Information not held	Refused under cost and time			
National Police Improvement Agency		Information not provided			
Norfolk Constabulary	39	£22,560	£48,938	£22,000	£93,498
North Wales Police	101	Information not held, any spending came from Home Office funding			
North Yorkshire Police	86		£68,778.22		
Northamptonshire Police	105	£0	£0	£5,005.75	£5,006
Northumbria Police	55	£389,000	£275,000	£37,000	£701,000
Nottinghamshire Police	65	Information not provided	Under £2000	Information not provided	£0
South Wales Police	91		£1,200,000		
South Yorkshire Police	Information not provided		£1,200		
Staffordshire Police	57	£12,000	£43,000	£0	£55,000
Suffolk Constabulary	82	£0	£46,638	£0	£46,638
Surrey Police	150		£1,798,836.70		
Sussex Police					£0
Thames Valley Police	201	£546,800	£502,700.00	£419,200.00	£1,468,700
Warwickshire Police	81	£116,943.45	£0	£65,651.16	£182,595
West Mercia	97	Not broken down by financial year:			

Police			£12,445.10		
West Midlands Police	366		£300,000		
West Yorkshire Police	225	£102,877	£165,000	£0	£267,877
Wiltshire Constabulary	95	£2,000	£133,000	£133,000	£268,000
Police Service of Northern Ireland	Refused	£564,500	£7,097,712	£584,312	£8,246,524
Police Scotland		Refused: National security			
British Transport Police	77	Information not held			
Civil Nuclear Constabulary	0	0	0	0	£0
Ministry of Defence Police	4		£29,503		
HM Revenue & Customs	0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Total	5236	£9,236,449	£10,376,841	£2,882,109	£22,495,399

Table 2: Police Data – Number of Searches against the ANPR Data Centre and the Number of Staff disciplined for unauthorised access

Police Force	The number of searches against the National ANPR Data Centre				The number of staff disciplined			
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Total	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	Total
Avon and Somerset Police	Refused: cost and time limits exceeded				0	0	0	0
Bedfordshire Police	0	0	39	39	0	0	0	0
Cambridgeshire Constabulary	0	253	2096	2349	0	0	0	0
Cheshire Constabulary	264	691	2179	3134	0	0	0	0
City of London Police	Information not held: Number of searches is combined with the Metropolitan Police's figures				0	0	0	0
Cleveland Police	0	45	581	626	0	0	0	0
Cumbria Constabulary	0	110	1597	1707	No information held			0
Derbyshire Constabulary	0	538	2658	3196	0	0	0	0
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	0 ¹⁰	19	724	743	0	0	0	0
Dorset Police	0	25	464	489	0	0	0	0
Durham Constabulary	Refused under time and cost				0	0	0	0
Dyfed Powys	Number of searches not				0	0	0	0

¹⁰ Force did not connect to the NADC until March 2011

Police	recorded							
Essex Police	Number of searches not recorded				0	0	0	0
Gloucestershire Constabulary	See Note ¹¹	2	1197	1199	0	0	0	0
Greater Manchester Police	Refused under time and cost				0	0	0	0
Gwent Police	Information not recorded				0	0	0	0
Hampshire Constabulary	26	176	626	828	0	0	0	0
Highways Agency	N/A	N/A	N/A	0	0	0	0	0
Humberside Police	Information not provided		609	609	0	0	0	0
Kent Police	0 ¹²	152	1226	1378	0	0	0	0
Lancashire Constabulary	0 ¹³		347	347	0	0	0	0
Leicestershire Police	58	6683	9675	16416	Information not held			0
Lincolnshire Police	0	35	786	821	0	0	0	0
Merseyside Police	0	12	990	1002	0	0	0	0
Metropolitan Police	Refused under cost and time				One case recorded with two allegations containing the keyword 'ANPR' but it was not related to 'unauthorised access to ANPR data'			0
Norfolk Constabulary	0	0	1232	1232	0	0	0	0
North Wales Police	0 ¹⁴	1	758	759	0	0	0	0
North	0	0	878	878	0	0	0	0

¹¹ Information not provided for 2009-10

¹² Did not have access to NADC in 2009-2010

¹³ Did not have access to NADC in 2009-2010

¹⁴ Did not have access to NADC in 2009-2010

Yorkshire Police								
Northamptonshire Police	0	158	2201	2359	Information not held			
Northumbria Police	0 ¹⁵	0	1724	1724	0	0	0	0
Nottinghamshire Police	609 searches between April 2010 and March 2012			609	0	0	0	0
South Wales Police	Refused under cost and time				0	0	0	0
South Yorkshire Police	1110	3367	7479	11956	0	0	0	0
Staffordshire Police	0	4	1034	1038	0	0	0	0
Suffolk Constabulary	0	0	224	224	0	0	0	0
Surrey Police	Information not held. This data is collected by NPIA				0	0	0	0
Sussex Police	Did not respond to FOI request							
Thames Valley Police	Data not available		198	198	0	0	0	0
Warwickshire Police	0 ¹⁶	0	893	893	0	0	0	0
West Mercia Police	Information not broken down by financial year: 3841			3841	0	1	0	1
West Midlands Police	4,376	14,632	17,153	36161	0	0	0	0
West Yorkshire Police	0	0	5,061	5061	0	0	0	0
Wiltshire Constabulary	Refused under time and cost				Information not held			
Police Service of Northern Ireland	Refused under time and cost		July 2012 - June 2013: 405	405	0	0	0	0
Police Scotland	Information not held							

¹⁵ Did not have access to NADC in 2009-2011

¹⁶ Did not have access to NADC in 2009-2011

British Transport Police	Information not held							
Civil Nuclear Constabulary	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ministry of Defence Police	24	58	21	103	0	0	0	0
HM Revenue & Customs	Searches conducted by local police forces on a case by case basis. There is no way of ascertaining the number of searches as this would exceed cost and time limitations.				0	0	0	0
Total	6751	27308	63410	101919	0	1	0	1

Table 3: Number of requests for data to the National Police Improvement Agency

Police Force	The number of searches against the National ANPR Data Centre			Total	The number of staff disciplined			Total
	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012		2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	
National Police Improvement Agency	20135	58347	145234	223716	Information not provided			

Appendix 1: Methodology

Beginning on the 29th November 2013, a Freedom of Information request was sent to Police Forces. It requested information relating to their use of ANPR, specifically how many cameras each force operated, the cost of installation, what their guidelines for use were and how many people had access to the data captured by them as well as how many officers had been disciplined for the misuse of this data.

On the 2nd February the request was also sent to the Highways Authority.

On the 13th March 2013 we sent the same request to HMRC, the Police Service of Northern Ireland, Police Scotland, The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA), the British Transport Police and the Civil Nuclear Constabulary.

We received responses from 98% of authorities, the only one not to respond was Sussex Constabulary.

11 police forces issued partial refusal notices, these were mainly because the FOI would otherwise have exceeded cost and time limits. SOCA refused the request in its entirety because it is not subject to Freedom of Information requests.

For the purposes of this report we included all responses up to an including **DATE**.

Appendix 2: Freedom of Information Request

Under the Freedom of Information Act I would like to request details of your police force's use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) cameras.

I request the following information:

1. The number of ANPR cameras currently operated by the police force. [As of 28th November 2012]
2. The amount spent in the financial years 2009-2012 on installing such cameras. [Please break down by financial year if possible.]
3. Details of any policy documentation held by the force on the use of ANPR. [Please include the documentation if possible.]
4. The number of searches the Force has made against the National ANPR Data Centre between the financial years 2009-2012. [Please break down by financial year if possible]
5. Details of the forces policy for using ANPR, i.e. who has access to the National ANPR Data Centre.
6. The number of staff disciplined for unauthorised access to the National ANPR Data Centre between the financial years 2009-2012 and the outcome. [Please break down by financial year if possible]

About Big Brother Watch

Big Brother Watch was set up to challenge policies that threaten our privacy, freedoms and our civil liberties, and to expose the true scale of the surveillance state.

Founded in 2009, we have produced unique research exposing the erosion of civil liberties in the UK, looking at the dramatic expansion of surveillance powers, the growth of the database state and the misuse of personal information.

We campaign to give individuals more control over their personal data, and hold to account those who fail to respect our privacy, whether private companies, government departments or local authorities.

Protecting individual privacy and defending civil liberties, Big Brother Watch is a campaign group for the digital age.

If you are a journalist and you would like to contact Big Brother Watch, including outside office hours, please call +44 (0) 7505 448925 (24hrs). You can also email: press@bigbrotherwatch.org.uk for written enquiries.

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