

BIG BROTHER WATCH

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7th October 2020

Grant Shapps, Secretary of State for Transport
Department for Transport

By email only

Covid-19 and electronic surveillance

Dear Mr Shapps,

I am writing to you regarding media reports that Government-funded artificial intelligence cameras and/or sensors, which can be used to monitor social distancing are in use in town centres in the UK and "in the pipeline" for other towns, and that such data is shared with the Department for Transport.¹ This project is reportedly in partnership with AI start-up Vivacity Labs.

As an organisation that protects the right to privacy and defends civil liberties in the UK, technologies that automate monitoring and deepen surveillance of the public are of great concern to Big Brother Watch. Any suggestion of deploying such technologies requires further examination, serious stakeholder consultation and of course close Data Protection Act 2018 and GDPR compliance.

I would be grateful if you could disclose and clarify the reported project, and associated plans, by way of reply.

First, I wish to submit some questions.

What data does the Department for Transport receive as a result of Vivacity Labs' software deployments in the UK?

Please provide any contract or agreements held between the Department for Transport and Vivacity Labs.

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) and/or an Equality Impact Assessment for the project been conducted? If so, please provide these.

The report claims that the planned Kent deployment would be part of a "wider national project to trial a variety of technologies" in the UK. Please can you provide details of the wider national project and the variety of technologies referred to?

Yours sincerely,

Silkie Carlo

Director of Big Brother Watch

¹ Artificial intelligence Vivacity cameras that can monitor coronavirus social distancing 'in pipeline' for Kent prompting privacy fears – Ciaran Duggan, Kent Online, 6th October:
<https://www.kentonline.co.uk/kent/news/cameras-to-monitor-social-distancing-in-pipeline-for-kents-town-centres-235059/?fbclid=IwAR2RB6NLejUatEGNnsCrYvnBsl2vnl0x5rfE6E8MU3g4jTDtcgkKiq6r0us>