



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 25, 2019

License-plate Readers Could Soon Be on Dashboards of Every Police Car

Axon (formerly known as Taser) is branching out into another lucrative business involved in the strengthening of the surveillance net that covers the country. This time, the company is looking to license-plate readers.

In a publicly available report, Axon pledges to put automatic license-plate readers (ALPR) on the dashboard of every police car in America.

Here's how the report describes the scope and sophistication of its dash-mounted license-plate readers:



ALPRs represent one of the most widely used surveillance systems in existence. ALPRs are computer-controlled camera systems that read passing license plates.

As used by law enforcement, ALPRs alert officers when they encounter a license plate of interest — such as the license plate of a vehicle that has been reported stolen. ALPR systems typically store data on all of the license plates they read, creating extremely large databases of vehicle information over time (also known as “historical data”).

The use of ALPRs has become common across the private and public sectors — in everything from public toll collection to private surveillance and security....

The Verge explains how Axon plans to put its products in police cars:

Axon provides dashcams under a brand of products called Axon Fleet, and the company told the board that the next generation of its cameras will include the readers.

The cameras will be able to process video of license plates through a laptop in an officer's car.

While some police departments already use readers mounted to their cars, Axon believes that a camera sitting on a dashboard “will enable agencies to deploy ALPRs more broadly than before, potentially across an agency's entire fleet of cars,” according to the board's report.

Under “ideal conditions” — based on lighting, distance, and vehicle speed — Axon says its camera “approaches” 100 percent accuracy, but will register a scan if it is 90 percent confident in its accuracy. The board's report notes that the cameras will likely also be able to recognize vehicle characteristics.

That is certainly impressive! The technology to track drivers and their cars with nearly “100 percent accuracy” will be available to patrol cars in every neighborhood, putting at the fingertips of police officers — officers of the government — the ability to track every car that comes within the range of its dash-mounted detectors.

Logically, one would expect a company to try and keep government regulators out of the way of their capitalizing on their jump on the competition. Not so for Axon, though. As stated in Axon's ethics report,



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“Without regulatory intervention,” the company’s ethics board writes, “there is a risk that competition will encourage a race-to-the-bottom of more pervasive and more powerful surveillance.”

Axon, you see, wants to ramp up the regulation so as to set itself up as the ethical alternative to the manifold ALPR providers that would violate the rights of drivers and passengers caught in the range of this powerful technology.

In its report, the company admits that there is a lot of potential for abuse and very little about how the data they sell for profit is collected, collated, and cataloged:

We do not know how many ALPRs there are, where they are deployed, how effective they are at helping to catch serious criminals or how frequently they are used simply to enforce low-level offenses. Retention rates for ALPR data vary widely, yet we largely are ignorant of how that historical data is used and accessed.

Never mind about the miasma of due-process and civil-rights abuses, there’s crime to fight:

We can say that the potential benefits of ALPRs appear real, yet the extent to which these potential benefits are realized is unknown. ALPRs can be used to locate stolen vehicles, identify vehicles of interest with regard to serious crimes, and locate the subjects of Amber or Silver alerts more efficiently and effectively. Police can use stored ALPR data to conduct investigations into a wide variety of crimes.

Regardless of the noble rhetoric, Axon and all its actual or eventual competitors are equipping those who are supposed to protect Americans with the technology and tools to set up virtual fences around the cars that travel through the counties of this country.

This roll-out of mobile and fixed tracking tools raises questions about the proper job of law enforcement. More and more, it seems, police are being trained and equipped to behave as soldiers rather than peace officers. All of this unfortunate transformation is aided by a federal government all too willing to give billions in grant money and used military equipment to local law-enforcement agencies in exchange for additional federal-local “cooperation.”

One unwarranted picture of a car and its passengers, one unwarranted wiretap, one unwarranted seizure of a phone record, or records of an individual’s digital communications is too many. If we are a republic of laws, then the supreme constitutional law of the land must be obeyed.

Taken together, the surveillance and tracking programs in use by the federal, state, and local governments place every American under the threat of constant surveillance. The courts, Congress, and the president have formed an unholy alliance bent on obliterating the Constitution and establishing a country where every citizen is a suspect and is perpetually under the never-blinking eye of the government.

The establishment will likely continue construction of the surveillance apparatus until the entire country is being watched around the clock and every monitored activity is recorded and made retrievable by agents who will have a dossier on every American.

The fight can yet be won, though. Americans can attack the sprawling surveillance state on several fronts. First, we must elect men and women to federal office who will honor their oaths of office to preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution. Then, once in office, each of them must be held immediately accountable for each and every violation of that oath.

Next, we must fill our state legislatures with men and women who will refuse to enforce any act of the



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federal government that exceeds the boundaries of its constitutionally granted powers. These lawmakers must force the federal beast back inside its constitutional cage and never accept even a degree of deviation from the blueprint drawn in Philadelphia in 1787.

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