



Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on October 15, 2013

Federal Grants Enable Increased Surveillance by Local Gov't

Not content to let the feds have all the fun, local governments are increasing their surveillance of citizens.

An [article published in the Sunday New York Times](#) reports that federal money is being doled out to cities to enable local law enforcement to “collect and analyze reams of surveillance data from around town.”

Oakland, for example, reportedly received a \$7-million federal grant ostensibly earmarked to help the coastal town “thwart terrorist attacks.” Once in the bank, city managers spent the money on a variety of surveillance apparatuses including everything “from gunshot-detection sensors in the barrios of East Oakland to license plate readers mounted on police cars patrolling the city’s upscale hills.”



For years, this reporter has covered the increasing dependency of local law enforcement on federal largesse and the regular disposal of federal funds on bolstering the surveillance infrastructure of the beneficiary towns.

All along the storied Las Vegas Strip, 37 surveillance cameras watch and record every movement.

Such an expensive purchase might surprise citizens of Sin City given that the Metropolitan Police Department is in the middle of a hiring freeze and has laid off dozens of officers all over the city.

The effects of the deep budget cuts will likely continue to be felt. [The Las Vegas Sun reports](#), “The outlook only threatens to worsen, with Metro facing a \$30 million budget deficit that could require it to shed as many as 250 additional officer positions over the next several years.”

Homeland Security has deep pockets, though, and the federal government loves using largesse to co-opt control of local law enforcement.

The Las Vegas Police Department received \$300,000 from the federal Department of Homeland Security. This generous grant paid for the cameras and the sophisticated surveillance software that powers them.

Before the DHS carrot and stick appeared, there were only eight cameras covering the area now under expanded surveillance.

DHS is proud of the success of its program to use federal funds to save struggling police departments and sheriff’s offices, converting them into “partners” with the massive and unconstitutional federal agency.



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“We have brought resources and expertise to our law enforcement partners and built new mechanisms to share information. This includes investments in training for local law enforcement and first responders of all types in order to increase expertise and capacity at the local level,” DHS states on its website.

Baltimore, Maryland, is another big city and popular tourist destination that has recently ramped up its ability to keep visitors and residents under the watchful eye of city government thanks to federal financial incentives.

In [a story published last October in the *Baltimore Sun*](#), it was reported that the Maryland Transit Administration (MTA) has installed microphones in 10 buses to record passenger conversations. The microphones — which the city plans to install in 330 more buses by next summer — are attached to the existing video surveillance system monitoring the city’s public transportation.

“We want to make sure people feel safe, and this builds up our arsenal of tools to keep our patrons safe,” said Ralign Wells, MTA administrator, in the *Baltimore Sun* article. “The audio completes the information package for investigators and responders,” he added.

There may be a problem with security on Baltimore’s buses and trains. According to data provided by the *Sun*:

MTA police dispatchers receive 45 to 100 daily calls for assistance from bus drivers for everything from an unhappy rider to criminal activity, said Capt. Burna McCollum, commander of the MTA police technical services division.

Video is a critical tool for investigators sorting out the details of an incident, but when witnesses walk away, are reluctant to cooperate or give conflicting accounts, an audio recording can fill in missing information, McCollum said.

In other words, the conversations saved on the MTA’s surveillance equipment will be made available to police investigators who will use the information revealed on the recordings to force citizens to “cooperate” with law enforcement regardless of personal preference.

Police in North Jersey have also been showered with gifts from their would-be federal overseers. [As reported by *The Record*](#):

Oradell, Emerson, Closter and Harrington Park police have car-mounted night-vision technology and video and recording equipment that can watch over the Oradell Reservoir and dam — and the hikers and anglers entering it. West Milford can do the same around the Newark watershed. Wayne police are scanning ... the license plates of vehicles outside the Willowbrook Mall, while East Rutherford officers patrol hotel parking lots near the Meadowlands and the Federal Reserve building off Route 17.

There has been resistance from residents that would be the targets of this expanded surveillance net. The *New York Times* reports:

Iowa City, for example, recently imposed a moratorium on some surveillance devices, including license plate readers. The Seattle City Council forced its police department to return a federally financed drone to the manufacturer.

In Virginia, the state police purged a database of millions of license plates collected by cameras, including some at political rallies, after the state’s attorney general said the method of collecting and saving the data violated state law. But for a cash-starved city like Oakland, the expectation of



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more federal financing makes the project particularly attractive. The City Council approved the program in late July, but public outcry later compelled the council to add restrictions. The council instructed public officials to write a policy detailing what kind of data could be collected and protected, and how it could be used. The council expects the privacy policy to be ready before the center can start operations.

From coast to coast, the Obama administration is giving high-tech gifts and bags of cash to struggling local law enforcement to entice them to become subcontractors in the building of the global gulag.

From the Department of Homeland Security to the NSA and the federal courts, every branch of the federal government is tugging at the blanket of surveillance, hoping to cover all of us under the “protection” of Big Brother so that no act of defiance will escape recognition and reprisal.

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