

I am writing to enquire about the details of ANPR cameras currently in your district. It would be hugely beneficial for us to find out:

1) The current total number of ANPR cameras in your district

150 lanes of traffic are covered by ANPR cameras in the West Midlands Police area

2) The names of the roads and streets covered i.e. camera locations

Section 31 (1) (a) (Law enforcement)
Section 24 (1) (National Security)

Please find our explanation in the (Public Interest Test (PIT) below) for the reasons these exemptions are relevant to this question

3) How many days a week/month/year (as appropriate) these cameras are monitored

ANPR cameras are operational 24/7, 7 days a week, 365 days a year in all cases and may be monitored in some instances. ANPR is not generally monitored as it automatically detects vehicle registrations and images can be retrieved retrospectively.

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Public Interest Test

Section 24 (1) (National Security)

Public Interest in Favour of Disclosure

The public are entitled to know how public funds are spent and resources distributed within the area of policing. Disclosure of the requested information would enable the general public to hold West Midlands Police to account on the way in which ANPR technology is deployed.

Detailing the number of any cameras within specific electoral wards would show the effectiveness of ANPR cameras in combating terrorist / criminal activities. The information would also be likely to aid public debate on the level of surveillance in the UK.

Public Interest in Favour of Non Disclosure

Security measures are put in place to protect the community that we serve. Any confirmation that cameras are held within a specific area would highlight to terrorists the details of which locations would be monitored by ANPR, allowing them to avoid such routes and therefore subsequent detection. Revealing specific locations would

dramatically weaken the effective use of ANPR as a monitoring tool in the fight against terrorism on a local and national scale.

In the current security climate within the United Kingdom, no information which may aid a criminal / terrorist should be disclosed. To what extent this information may aid a terrorist is unknown, but it is clear that it will have a considerable negative impact on the force's ability to monitor terrorist activity. The public entrust the Police Service to make appropriate decisions with regard to their safety and protection and the only way of reducing risk is to be cautious with the information that is released.

Section 31 (1) (a) (Law enforcement)

Public Interest in Favour of Disclosure

There is information within the public domain confirming that the police use ANPR in relation to the prevention and detection of terrorism, serious crime, volume crime and fatal and serious injury road traffic incidents.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10337961>

<http://www.theguardian.com/uk/2010/jun/17/birmingham-stops-spy-cameras-project>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-birmingham-13331161>

There are a number of reports within the public domain from 2010 when ANPR cameras were highlighted in a particular area of Birmingham. Confirmation of any ANPR cameras in a specific location would enhance the public's knowledge about how ANPR is used by the Constabulary and the specific nature of the technology. There is a lot of contention over the use of ANPR as a system that is used to spy and monitor people's activities. Disclosure would aid the public's understanding of how ANPR operates and for what direct purpose, stopping any incorrect rumours or falsehoods that may already exist.

Public Interest in Favour of Non Disclosure

Disclosure would compromise any ongoing criminal investigations, which make use of the data produced by the camera. In addition, the technology can be used in combating acts of terrorism but also in the prevention and detection of crime and in the reduction of death and injury on the roads. Therefore, to disclose the location of any cameras below force level, their capability to prevent such activity would be compromised. Release of the information would mean that the ANPR's role in the prevention and detection of crime would be compromised. The safety of the public is of paramount importance to the policing purpose, and an increase in crime would place the public at risk of harm.

The disclosure of the location of camera's previously in 2010 has led to community tensions, with communities feeling targeted and vulnerable. Criminal groups were would be aware of the location therefore diverting their criminal activity to other locations.

Balance

Disclosure of any information below force level would have a serious negative impact on the ability of the Police to carry out operational or intelligence lead policing. Weakening the mechanisms used to monitor any type of criminal activity, and

specifically terrorist activity would place the security of the country in an increased level of danger. ANPR is one of many tools used to help maintain national security and is not outweighed by the fact that disclosure would make the general public better informed about the system and its use.

Information disclosed under the Freedom of Information Act is made public to the world when released, and has an impact on all areas of the country. Disclosure of ANPR locations within this Division would mean that any subsequent FOI request for other areas would be treated similarly. A series of disclosures for this information would mean that terrorists and criminals would be able to build up a picture of where such technology was deployed throughout the whole country. Disclosure at a national level would encourage those with criminal intent to relocate and intensify their activities to areas that are less well covered by ANPR as they would have a renewed level of confidence in evading detection.

ANPR needs to be understood as a vital tool in safeguarding the security of the country and any disclosure that would impact on this must be of a greater importance to the public. ANPR is an internationally recognised tool that can significantly reduce volume crime, increase detection rates, tackle cross-border crime and provide vital intelligence for use in counter terrorist and serious crime work.

Having considered all the factors, at this moment in time, it is our opinion that for these issues the balance test favours neither confirming nor denying that information is held.