

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) – frequently asked questions

How does ANPR technology work?

The cameras are pointed at a fixed location on the road. As a vehicle passes an ANPR camera, its registration number is read and instantly checked against national database records of vehicles of interest.

If a match is identified, officers are alerted and can conduct further analysis and allocate resource. Police officers can stop a vehicle, speak to the occupants and, where necessary, make arrests.

ANPR has proved to be important in the detection of many offences, including locating, for example, people wanted for arrest or missing, witnesses, stolen vehicles, uninsured vehicles and uncovering cases of major crime.

What do the police not use ANPR for?

UK Police forces do not use the national network of ANPR cameras to:

- monitor and enforce speed limits and/or to directly issues Fixed Penalty Notices
- use biometric or facial recognition technology to identify the drivers or passengers in a vehicle

What do the police use ANPR for?

UK Police forces use the national network of ANPR cameras to detect, deter and disrupt criminality. The police use ANPR for:

- checking if a vehicle is insured
 - checking if a vehicle is taxed (this can also be performed by some local authorities)
 - identifying stolen vehicles
 - stopping terrorism, major and organised crime incidents
 - supporting Government security agencies
 - gathering case evidence for major, and organised crime
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What are the benefits of increased police ANPR cameras?

ANPR technology, coupled with immediate follow-up police action, has the potential to deny criminals the use of the roads. ANPR is an enormously effective operational tool which allows the police to target known offenders.

How many ANPR cameras are there in the UK?

There are over 11,000 ANPR cameras operating across the UK, which collectively read around 60 million number plates daily.

How many ANPR cameras does GMP currently have and how many ANPR cameras were installed for the proposed Clean Air Zone?

Around 400 Clean Air government-funded cameras have been installed across Greater Manchester for the formerly proposed Clean Air Zone, which is not now going ahead.

Are ANPR cameras always on?

Yes, ANPR cameras operate 24/7 all year round, because traffic flows at day and night.

Do ANPR cameras work at night?

Yes.

How is ANPR data stored by the police?

A record for all vehicles passing by a camera is stored, including those for vehicles that are not known to be of interest at the time of the read.

At present ANPR cameras nationally submit on average around 60 million ANPR 'read' records to national ANPR systems daily.

ANPR data from each police force is stored together with similar data from other forces for one year.

There are clear rules for storage and use of images:

- Access is limited to GMP staff with a valid reason relevant to their role.
 - Most data is only accessible to people with permission for up to 90 days from the date it was collected.
 - Serious, major or counter-terrorism investigations may allow some staff data access for up to one year, with senior approval.
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Do the ANPR cameras allow identification of vehicle occupants?

The collection of data and camera setup is such that rarely is any image of sufficient quality to provide identification of vehicle occupants. The identification of vehicle occupants is not what the system is designed or used for.

Does the use of ANPR by the Police infringe on my human rights?

Human Rights (in particular Article 8) are engaged by the use of ANPR but any interference with the rights of the public are deemed necessary and proportionate to promote public safety, national security and / or to prevent crime.

Are ANPR cameras used to detect motoring offences?

Data collected from ANPR cameras serves as an effective police resource for search and identification. It's only where a vehicle is of interest to the police because a motoring offence is noted, or there is other known criminal activity associated with it, that a vehicle would be stopped.

What will happen to the cameras if Greater Manchester Police don't take control of them?

The cameras and the data they generate are still required to monitor and assess the effectiveness of the investment-led Clean Air Plan, to understand vehicle emissions on the city region's roads.

Some of the existing cameras will remain in place to support this work and GMP will continue to have to formally request the information from Transport for Greater Manchester to support investigations as happens currently.

Why are you holding a consultation and when will a decision be made?

The Surveillance Camera Code of Practice confirms that any change to the purposes for which a surveillance camera system was established and images and information are collected should be subject to consultation before any decision is taken. We want to understand local views on this change of the main use of these ANPR cameras and bringing them into GMP's existing ANPR network, before a decision is made. A decision on future use of the cameras is planned to be made by the end of 2025.

How will ANPR data be used for transport planning and congestion management?

ANPR data can help transport planners analyse traffic flow, journey times, and vehicle movements. By spotting congestion patterns and evaluating routes, authorities can make better transport planning and network management decisions. Anonymised registration data also reveals how and when vehicles use roads, supporting efficient and safe traffic management.

How will the ANPR data be used for monitoring Greater Manchester's investment-led Clean Air Plan?

ANPR data enables TfGM to monitor the types and emission standards of vehicles operating on the city region's roads, supporting the evaluation of the investment-led Clean Air Plan's effectiveness. Through analysis of this data, TfGM can calculate emissions and assess the impact of vehicle usage on air quality.

Why don't you just use the ANPR cameras for monitoring the investment-led Clean Air Plan and ensuring that Greater Manchester's plan is cutting emissions and improving public health outcomes?

Government has backed Greater Manchester's investment-led plan to deliver legal compliance with nitrogen dioxide. So the cameras are not required for their original purpose. However, the ANPR data will help monitor the types of vehicles running on the region's roads.

Already air quality is improving in the city region. The latest air quality monitoring data for 2024 shows that air pollution had fallen compared to 2023 and is significantly lower than levels recorded pre-pandemic in 2019.

In 2019, air quality monitoring data showed 129 locations of nitrogen dioxide exceedance. This has now fallen to 38 sites across the city region, down from 64 in 2023.

This gradual improvement in air quality is in part driven by investment in the Bee Network, as well as people upgrading to cleaner vehicles, and through existing Clean Air Plan investments in cleaner vehicles.

How is the operation of GMP's ANPR cameras and related data systems funded?

The funding for GMP's ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) cameras and their associated data systems in Greater Manchester is provided through Greater Manchester Police (GMP) budget. This budget consists of central government grants, local council precepts, and other allocations designated to support policing across the city region.

What is the cost of changing the use of cameras?

The estimated one-off costs for transferring and integrating the Clean Air Zone ANPR cameras into the GMP ANPR network range from £0.7m to £1.2m, with annual costs expected to be between £1.4m and £2.1m. Any final proposal that may be recommended for approval after reviewing the consultation responses would include updated cost information.

What measures are in place to protect personal privacy when using ANPR data?

A range of safeguards and protocols are implemented protect personal privacy when using ANPR data.

Access to the data is restricted to authorised personnel and is governed by strict legal frameworks, ensuring that information is only used for legitimate purposes such as transport planning or supporting formal investigations.

All data is handled in accordance with the Surveillance Camera Code of Practice and relevant data protection legislation, which include requirements for robust security, regular audits, and the minimisation of any risk of misuse.

Where possible, data is anonymised for analytical purposes, so identifiable information is only retained or shared when absolutely necessary and justified. Furthermore, transparency measures such as public consultation and clear privacy notices help keep the community informed about how their information is managed and protected.