

# Mantua Police deploy license-plate reading cameras to the entrances of town

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by Jeremy Harris, KUTV

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MANTUA, Utah (KUTV) — Police in the small northern Utah town of Mantua have deployed a pair of license-plate reading cameras to two roads leading into town. Officers plan to use the license-plate data as a law enforcement tool, and officials from the Mantua Police spoke with 2News on Friday about how they plan to balance the cameras' capacity to help solve crimes with the privacy of people who visit or live in

Mantua.

"We're not interested in seeing what time you go to work or what time you come home," Sgt. Joshua Jefferies said.

The technology comes from Georgia-based Flock Safety, which provides license-plate reading systems to law enforcement nationwide.

The cameras register license plate information and store it on a system that Mantua Police can access for 30 days. An officer can sort the stored data by a variety of criteria, including time range and type of vehicle. According to Jefferies, an officer must enter a reason for each search that is conducted of the database.

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"We're not just looking up plates at random," he said.

Jefferies cited a high-dollar burglary from a construction site in Mantua that left detectives with no solid leads. He said if the camera technology had been in place at that time, they could have combed the database to look for potential suspect vehicles.

"The camera provides us with another investigative tool to help us solve crime," he said. But privacy advocates raise concern with license-plate tracking technology.

Jason Stevenson, the strategic communication manager for the ACLU of Utah, said these cameras can flirt the line of legitimate public safety purpose with unnecessary surveillance.

“The bigger issue here is that people in Utah have a right to be free from unwarranted surveillance from the police,” Stevenson said. “These readers are being used, not necessarily for public safety, just to vacuum up information.”

In 2013 and 2014, the Utah State Legislature set guidelines for how automatic license plate readers can be used by law enforcement.

“These license plate readers were bought to ensure the safety and security of Mantua. They will be used to identify who comes into and out of town and at what hours. This information will be used as an investigative tool if we as a town experience a string of crimes, or have a major crime that needs to be investigated,” the department wrote on its Facebook page.

The cameras cost Mantua \$5,500, which was paid for by COVID-19 funds that the city received, according to the police department.

“This year it was purchased with COVID money, in the future it will just be part of our police budget,” Jefferies said.

Ogden Police uses the same technology from Flock Systems and has indicated it plans to expand the use of the technology, according to a December report by the Standard-Examiner.