

Ethical Framework and Policy Guidelines for License Plate Readers

Los Alamos County Council Presentation

June 30, 2026

ATTACHMENT A

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Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPR) Program History

The ALPR system was introduced in 2023 as part of the County's commitment to public safety and responsible technology use. ALPRs are used exclusively for law enforcement, with data securely stored and accessible only to trained staff. The County emphasized transparency and privacy throughout the process. New Mexico's Senate Bill 40 (effective July 2026) further strengthened oversight by strictly limiting ALPR data use, banning sharing for certain activities, and requiring regular reporting.

County Use of ALPRs

ALPR technology has been utilized by LAPD through a Motorola Watchguard agreement for several years. A new agreement was approved in January 2026 with Axon, and the transition from Motorola to Axon is in process.

The Core Commitment

- Enhance public safety while protecting civil liberties
- Clear guardrails for data collection, usage, and storage
- State mandated compliance reporting and local system audits

Case Law

- The U.S. Supreme Court has not yet directly ruled on a case specifically involving Automated License Plate Recognition (ALPRs). However, law enforcement (LE) and lower courts heavily rely on a foundational bedrock of longstanding Supreme Court Fourth Amendment doctrines to support the warrantless use of ALPR technology.
- The primary Supreme Court decision and legal concept supporting ALPR use includes:

The "Plain View" and Public Thruways Doctrine

Katz v. United States (1967): The Court famously established that "What a person knowingly exposes to the public... is not a subject of Fourth Amendment protection." Because license plates are required by law to be clearly visible on public roads, drivers have no reasonable expectation of privacy regarding them.

Public Safety

- Amber/Silver/Brittany/Turquoise Alerts, Endangered Person Advisories.
- Criminal Deterrence and Apprehension
- Investigative Force Multiplier
- Traffic Safety Initiatives
- National Crime Information Center (NCIC) “Hits”

Civil Liberties

- NM State Law and Local Policy
- Data Retention Limits
- Mandated State Reporting and System Audits
- Data Sharing Limitations
- Audit/System Access Logs
- System Design



Los Alamos County Camera Summary

Security Cameras

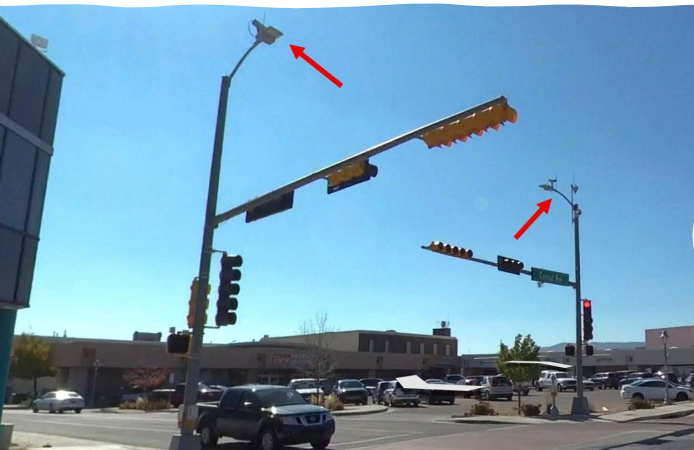
- LAC does have other cameras that are used for building security, such as on the outside of the Municipal Building
- Retention of this data is 180 days

Traffic Operation Cameras

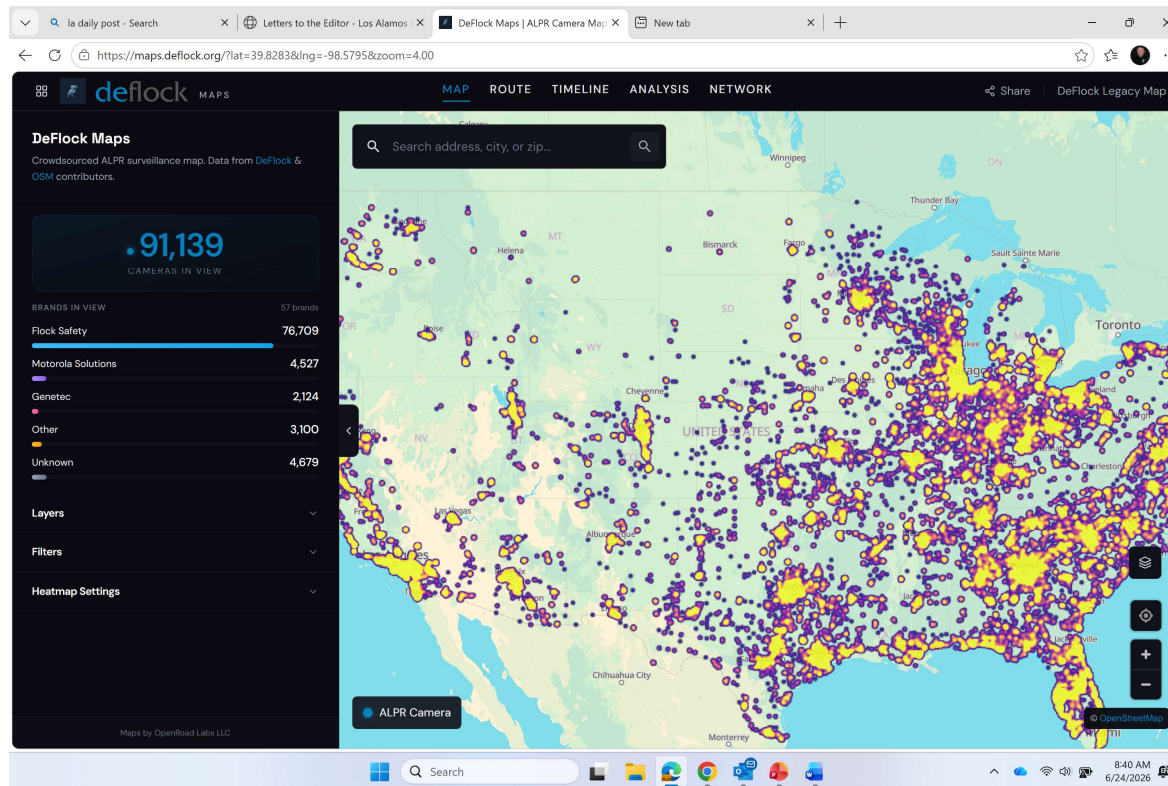
- LAC uses specific cameras on traffic signals that are used for the operation of the traffic signal
 - Used to monitor vehicle presence (for example, if a vehicle is in a left turn lane), adjust signal timing and monitor traffic flow
- Retention of this data is 28 days

MyDrive Cameras

- Live streaming video of major roadways throughout LA and WR
- Retention of this data is 28 days



ALPR Tracking – Image of Cameras In Use



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Data Storage and Retention

Agencies set retention, and data is purged automatically. ALPR data is transferred into the agency's secure instance of Axon Evidence, where retention periods are configured and can vary depending on the event the data collected is from involves citations, lawsuits, or public records requests as examples.

Non-evidentiary ALPR data is automatically deleted per agency policy. Axon provides recommended defaults, and agencies configure and control the settings themselves.

Data Access & Internal Auditing

Axon platforms maintain immutable audit logs showing who accessed data, when, and why, ensuring accountability.

LAPD Policy requires regular and unannounced system audits.

Third Party Sharing

- Agencies control access to their ALPR data. Data sharing is invite-only, visible, and revocable.
- Axon does not operate a national pool or enable automatic sharing, and agencies always know exactly who has access to their data.
- Axon's access is limited to rare support cases and when explicitly authorized by the agency.
- Shared access does not create copies of ALPR records, and agencies retain sole ownership and disclosure authority over their data.

Conclusion & Questions

- ALPR helps agencies accelerate investigations, find missing persons, and better protect the communities they serve by locating and identifying those vehicles faster and more accurately.
- ALPR helps agencies accelerate investigations, find missing persons, and better protect the communities they serve by locating and identifying those vehicles faster and more accurately.
- ALPR is not surveillance for surveillance's sake. When designed responsibly, it provides safety with accountability. Agencies retain ownership, set the rules, and preserve community trust with transparency tools. Designed in alignment with Axon's Responsible Innovation framework, they give agencies a model that is effective in the field and defensible in the community.