

Number plates capture criminals in Devon's Country Mile

Devon's country mile project, funded by the Department for Transport, is making extensive use of previously unavailable data, largely gained through fixed roadside sensors providing information ranging from vehicle types to average speeds and individual separation distances. In tandem with this, the established Automatic Number plate recognition system (ANPR) already operated by Devon and Cornwall Police is being extensively utilised in the Country Mile area. ANPR systems can check multiple databases like the vast DVLA and Police National Computer records in seconds, so every day, officers are using ANPR in new ways to stop criminals from operating in the county - by denying their use of the roads.

Because ANPR is an "alert" system, it can assist in detecting a range of offences not necessarily directly connected with vehicles. At any time, knowledge gained about those involved in criminal or suspicious activities may be added against vehicle registrations locally, or by any British Police force. Such vehicles might be legally taxed and insured, but when spotted by any ANPR camera, notes attached to the registration will activate an immediate alarm, warning of a suspect vehicle. Depending on the information displayed, officers can take action ranging from simple observations to stopping the vehicle to make enquiries relating to the information available - or regarding offences noted against it or the driver.

Within both Devon County and the Country mile area, innovative use of ANPR is proving invaluable in resolving many offences. Ultimately, ANPR has the capability of detecting offences such as child kidnapping, and in the apprehension of those involved in terrorism. ANPR is also being increasingly used in tracking thefts of boats, plant and equipment, and as an important aid in tracing vulnerable and 'at-risk' people where vehicles have been involved in their disappearance.