

AUTOMATIC NUMBER PLATE RECOGNITION: HYPOTHECATION PROJECT

Joint Report of the Chief Constable, Clerk and Treasurer

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of this report is to inform members of a successful bid for funding from the Home Office in respect of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) Hypothecation Pilot Project.

2 BACKGROUND

A Home Office report into vehicle documentation crime revealed that 79% of mainstream offenders had a criminal record, concluding that profiling of traffic offenders can focus effort in devising strategies to target criminals. Comparisons with normal traffic policing methods indicate that ANPR can be around ten times more effective in detecting this criminal activity, primarily because ANPR systems identify vehicles of interest that may not normally attract police attention.

The ANPR system comprises of a roadside camera reading facility with selected database interrogation. 'Project Laser' is the Government's next phase of ANPR and aims to increase the use of ANPR technology in tackling crime.

Recent pilots of ANPR technology by other forces have provided favourable results utilising roadside and compatible CCTV systems, in conjunction with 'intercept teams' of dedicated police officers. Once vehicles have been identified, using ANPR technology, officers stop offenders and issue fixed penalty notices at the roadside where appropriate, or arrest offenders where criminal offences are suspected.

The experience of these forces has shown that ANPR is chiefly a crime reduction initiative, which does not concentrate exclusively on vehicle documentation crime (excise and licencing breaches). Wanted offenders and those breaching a variety of laws have been brought to police attention.

The Home Office decided to expand this system and to allow cost recovery through fines (hypothecation). To assess the benefits, the Home Office decided to set up a pilot to run over a two year period, and in March 2003 forces were invited to submit business case bids for inclusion on this pilot scheme.

Northumbria Police submitted a business case bid and was granted Home Office pilot status allowing the hypothecation of fines for road traffic offences detected by ANPR technology during the period, 1 June 2003 to 31 March 2004.

The ANPR Hypothecation Project represents a valuable opportunity for the Force to increase operational effectiveness in wider crime detection through targeting of traffic offences.

3 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES IMPLICATIONS

Nil.

4 HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLICATIONS

Northumbria Police recognises that the use of ANPR could potentially impact on a member of the public's right to respect for private and family life. Where ANPR operates in the public domain, it has contributed to the detection of crime, therefore provided the use of material is subject to the correct safeguards against improper use, ANPR may be justified.

5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is envisaged the scheme will be self financing during the course of the pilot. The total cost of running the pilot scheme is £376,000, £317,000 of which reflects the cost of staffing and equipment, which for the duration of the project can be met from existing establishments and equipment and therefore at no additional cost to the Authority.

The remaining cost of £59,000 will be offset by estimated income to be received of £52,000, leaving a projected shortfall of £7,000.

The Treasurer confirms that the project shortfall of £7,000, arising from this Pilot Project, can be met from within the overall revenue budget for 2003/04.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Members are asked to:

- i) note the contents of the report;
- ii) agree to receive a further report detailing the outcome of the pilot.