

BIG BROTHER IS HERE

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While walking one evening I came upon a BCPD patrol car equipped with the high tech license plate reader. The officer was standing beside the car having a cup of coffee so I decided to have a closer look and ask a few questions.

I wondered if there had been any successes with the system. The officer told me that the system had led to the recovery of one stolen vehicle. Unfortunately, while the vehicle had been stolen, it had also been found and returned to the owner. Someone forgot to note this fact in the database. The end result was that the vehicle was stopped and the owner ordered out of his vehicle at gun point. I do not think this particular "success" will be making the news soon.

I asked more questions. The BCPD now has two patrol cars that have this specialized equipment . The cameras have both daylight and night vision (infrared) capability. When the camera is in operation, it archives data. This information, depending upon how long it is kept, can be recalled later and the location of vehicles plotted on a map. The officer likened the application to Google's mapping system.

If you can track a vehicle around town, you can also track its occupant. Shouldn't we be uncomfortable if an officer can drive by a political meeting, and identify the attendees by their license plates, or keep tabs on who might be sleeping with who given where vehicles are parked overnight?

Depending on how much this system costs to operate/maintain it might become a casualty if budget cuts were to occur. One way or another it needs policy guidelines and monitoring. Privacy issues need to be addressed.