
City, County and CHP Defends License Plate Cameras

By Linda Sutter October 15, 2026

CRESCENT CITY, CA (MPG) - At a sparsely attended town hall hosted by K FUGS Community Radio, county, city and state law enforcement leaders defended the use of automated license plate readers (ALPRs) while fielding pointed questions from residents concerned about privacy, cybersecurity and oversight.

Sheriff Scott told the crowd the county has a three year, roughly \$20,000 per year contract with vendor FLOCK Safety, funded through a state grant program. He described ALPRs as a “force multiplier” for jurisdictions with limited patrol resources, saying the cameras help secure intersections and locate vehicles quickly in time sensitive incidents such as kidnappings or shootings. The sheriff said the county owns the data and that Flock Safety “does not sell” it; he also said searches require documented justification and that the sheriff’s office is preparing a public transparency portal to show when and why officers access ALPR records.

California Highway Patrol Lieutenant Castro emphasized legal limits and internal safeguards. Citing SB34, he said state law bars sharing ALPR information with private entities and with out of state or federal agencies. Castro described procedural controls including annual user agreements, mandatory entry of case numbers and reasons for each search, and regular audits by the Office of Criminal Investigations.

City police Chief Griffin explained their systems are tied to in car Axon equipment and described tighter local retention policies. The police chief said the department reduced AXON retention to seven days and now requires higher standards — including, in some cases, a warrant — before conducting searches. He also said he is the only person in the department authorized to run AXON searches and acknowledged the need to improve internal auditing.

Residents raised multiple concerns: the possibility of automated speed camera enforcement (officials denied such use locally), the aggregation of ALPR data into national databases, vendor cybersecurity vulnerabilities, and broader Continued from page 1 civil liberties implications of tracking vehicle movements. A cybersecurity specialist in the audience referenced more than 50 known vulnerabilities for some ALPR platforms in national databases; officials responded that no system is perfectly secure, noted vendors run bug bounty/penetration programs, and urged legislation requiring breach notifications and stronger vendor accountability.

Officials offered examples of ALPR utility, hits on hotlists that located stolen vehicles, helping find a missing dementia patient, and assisting other agencies such as U.S. Marshals in at least one case. Yet several speakers

conceded high profile local cases solved directly by ALPRs have been few, and that continued public trust depends on oversight, training and transparent reporting.

Funding and policy priorities were debated. Sheriff Scott argued the modest annual cost is small relative to hiring deputies and helps intercept fentanyl and other contraband.

The meeting was there to inform and educate the public. With the ongoing contention expressed on social media, it was unfortunate so few attended. But one thing was clear. Flock is here, legislatures are behind, and we are all learning along the way.