

DAILY BREEZE

License-plate reading security cameras coming to Manhattan Beach

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PUBLISHED: April 9, 2016 at 5:21 p.m. | UPDATED: September 6, 2017 at 5:08 a.m.

In an increasingly popular effort to curb crime, Manhattan Beach plans to install video cameras with license-plate reading technology at seven entry points to the city this fall.

The City Council unanimously backed a plan last week to pursue the \$400,000 network of cameras, which would alert law enforcement every time they detect a vehicle flagged in databases as stolen or wanted in a criminal investigation.

The idea of having cameras at egress and ingress points was first proposed to city leaders last year.

On Tuesday, Police Chief Eve Irvine said it would cost “millions of dollars” to have them at all 50 entry points to Manhattan Beach, so it would be most effective to focus on seven high-traffic areas:

- El Porto at 45th Street and Highland Avenue
- Rosecrans Avenue at Sepulveda Boulevard and at Aviation Boulevard
- Aviation Boulevard at Marine Avenue and at Manhattan Beach Boulevard
- Artesia Boulevard at Sepulveda and Aviation boulevards

Irvine stressed that authorities will not monitor video feeds, but only use specific footage to help locate suspect vehicles or reactively solve crimes.

“These are not surveillance cameras, these are security cameras — there’s a difference,” Irvine said. “I just want to make sure people understand we’re not Big Brother, we’re not surveilling, we’re not watching over at all times.”

Irvine said police must have a legitimate investigative purpose to access the footage, which would not include audio recordings. The multidirectional cameras would not point at private homes or businesses and would not be used for minor moving violations.

Unless needed long term for investigations, footage will be deleted from the Police Department's servers after 30 days, and encrypted data from the license-plate readers will be kept for only one year.

The cameras will not only help law enforcement with investigations, Irvine said, but also create visible crime deterrents.

"Criminals want the easy way out," she said, noting that other cities including Long Beach and Beverly Hills are using the technology. "They don't want to deal with being noticed."

The Palos Verdes Peninsula [also is installing the cameras after seeing an uptick in burglaries](#).

But before the system is purchased, Manhattan Beach will host community meetings to gather feedback as early as next month. The council could vote on a contract in July or August and start testing the cameras in September or October. They also would have to craft and share a privacy policy.

Irvine said the city may piggyback on the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department's contract for automated license plate recognition — or ALPR — technology.

Though the council members supported the idea, several raised privacy and legal questions.

"Do we have data on how effective these cameras have been?" asked Councilman David Lesser. "Have we really explored it?"

Irvine said three state laws passed last year strengthen privacy protections by making license plate numbers personal data and requiring cities to actively keep data encrypted and notify the public of any breaches.

Lesser noted that a staff report for one of them, Senate Bill 34, cited a 2013 ACLU study that found only 1 percent of scans by the cameras result in hits.

But Irvine said the cameras won't be used for scanning purposes only, and can help find suspect vehicles described by eyewitnesses, for example.

"It may very well be only 1 percent, but that's not even half of the story of what we utilize it for," she said.

The system is separate from a security camera program rolled out in February asking residents to [register their private security systems](#) with the Police Department to help officers get a head start investigating crimes.

So far, 51 homeowners and businesses have signed up, Irvine said.