Community Information Brief: Flock Safety License Plate Reader Cameras

Background:
A recent report in the Gatesville Messenger described a discussion by the Gatesville City Council regarding the potential installation of automated license plate reader cameras. According to the article, the Gatesville Police Department budgeted approximately $15,000 for five cameras pending council approval. The cameras would photograph license plates of vehicles traveling within range and could be installed in certain Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) right-of-ways. These cameras are manufactured by the public safety technology company Flock Safety.

This brief explains how the system works and what questions communities commonly ask.

What Are Flock Safety Cameras?

Flock Safety cameras are Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) devices used by law enforcement agencies to help identify vehicles connected to criminal activity. The cameras capture still images of vehicles that pass within range and use software to identify license plate numbers, vehicle make and model, vehicle color, and distinguishing characteristics such as roof racks or bumper stickers. The system is designed to identify vehicles, not individuals.

How Are They Used?

Law enforcement agencies commonly use license plate reader systems in cases involving stolen vehicles, AMBER Alerts for missing children, Silver Alerts for missing elderly individuals, wanted suspects, protective order violations, and vehicles connected to criminal investigations. If a vehicle associated with an active alert passes a camera, officers may receive a notification.

What Information Is Collected?

The cameras typically record a photo of the license plate, a vehicle overview image, the time and date, and the camera location. These cameras capture images rather than continuous video recordings.

How Long Is Data Stored?

According to publicly available information from Flock Safety, images are normally stored for 30 days before automatic deletion. During the council discussion reported by the

Gatesville Messenger, Police Chief Jeff Clark stated that images used by local personnel are deleted within that timeframe.

Are These Cameras Connected to Other Cities?

Flock Safety operates a shared network platform used by participating law-enforcement agencies. This allows departments to share alerts for vehicles connected to stolen vehicle cases, missing persons alerts, and criminal investigations. Each law-enforcement agency typically controls which other agencies it shares information with.

Why Do Some Officials Raise Concerns?

While many communities use ALPR technology, some officials and residents have raised questions regarding privacy protections, cybersecurity risks, data sharing across jurisdictions, and the potential for expanded surveillance.

Questions Communities Often Ask

Who has access to the data? How long is the information stored? What oversight policies exist? What safeguards prevent misuse? Can the public review transparency reports?

Source Acknowledgment

Reporting context for the Gatesville discussion was published by the Gatesville Messenger. Technical explanations are based on publicly available information from Flock Safety and law-enforcement technology resources.