
SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS

Senator Sabrina Cervantes, Chair
2025 - 2026 Regular Session

SB 1013 (Cervantes) - Automated license plate recognition systems

Version: March 25, 2026

Policy Vote: TRANS. 9 - 3, P., D.T., &
C.P. 7 - 2

Urgency: No

Mandate: Yes

Hearing Date: May 4, 2026

Consultant: Mark McKenzie

Bill Summary: SB 1013 would, among other things, require operators and users of automated license plate recognition (ALPR) systems to enhance reasonable security procedures by limiting access to ALPR systems and requiring data security and data privacy training for employees with access to those systems. The bill would also prohibit public agencies from retaining ALPR information for more than 30 days, except as specified, and require the Department of Justice (DOJ) to conduct random audits of public agencies that are operators or end-users of ALPR information, upon appropriation of funding for that purpose.

Fiscal Impact:

- Unknown General Fund cost pressures, likely at least in the high hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, for the DOJ to conduct random audits of public agencies that are ALPR operators or end-users. DOJ costs would only be incurred to the extent sufficient funds are appropriated in the annual Budget Act for these purposes, and the magnitude of this funding would determine how many audits could be conducted in a given year.
- Unknown, potentially significant state-mandated local costs for affected local public agencies who are ALPR operators or end-users to comply with the requirements of this bill, including costs to revise policies and procedures to ensure ALPR information is not retained longer than 30 days, to revise security procedures and practices to restrict access to ALPR information, and to develop and conduct training for all employees who access ALPR information, as specified. These local costs may or may not be subject to state-reimbursement, subject to a determination by the Commission on State Mandates. See Staff Comments. (General Fund)
- Unknown, potentially significant costs in the aggregate, for state agencies who are ALPR operators or end-users to comply with the requirements of the bill. The California Highway Patrol indicates that any costs would be absorbable within existing resources. (various funds)

Background: Existing law defines an ALPR system as a searchable computerized database resulting from the operation of one or more fixed or mobile cameras combined with computer algorithms to read and convert images of registration plates (license plates) and the characters they contain into computer-readable data. Existing law also defines "ALPR operator" as a person that operates an ALPR system, and "ALPR end-user" as a person that accesses or uses such as system, but both definitions exclude a transportation agency that conducts electronic toll collection. Existing law prohibits a

public agency (the state, cities, counties, and any other political subdivision of the state, including law enforcement agency) from selling, sharing, or transferring ALPR information or data collected from an ALPR system, except to another public agency, and only as permitted by law.

Existing law, as enacted by SB 34 (Hill), Chap. 532/2015, requires an ALPR operator to maintain reasonable security procedures and practices, including operational, administrative, technical, and physical safeguards, to protect ALPR information from unauthorized access, destruction, use, modification, or disclosure. ALPR operators must implement usage and privacy policies in order to ensure that the collection, use, maintenance, sharing, and dissemination of ALPR information is consistent with respect for individuals' privacy and civil liberties. Existing law also requires ALPR end-users to maintain reasonable security procedures and practices, including operational, administrative, technical, and physical safeguards, to protect ALPR information from unauthorized access, destruction, use, modification, or disclosure. ALPR end-users must implement usage and privacy policies in order to ensure that the access, use, sharing, and dissemination of ALPR information is consistent with respect for individuals' privacy and civil liberties. It further requires the policies to include, at a minimum, certain elements.

In 2019, the State Auditor, at the request of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, conducted an audit of four large law enforcement agencies use of ALPR systems and data (see "California State Auditor Report 2019-118"). Among the findings of the audit report noted the following: and found, among other things:

- The four agencies had accumulated a large number of ALPR data, nearly none of which are related to criminal investigations.
- The four agencies had not implemented all of the requirements of SB 34 (Hill, 2015).
- Poorly developed and incomplete policies contributed to the agencies' failure to implement ALPR programs that reflect the privacy principles in SB 34.
- Three of the reviewed agencies shared their ALPR images widely, yet the State Auditor found no evidence that the agencies had always determined whether an entity receiving shared images had a right and a need to access the images or even that the receiving entity was a public agency.

The State Auditor report made several recommendations to the Legislature, including:

- To require DOJ to draft and make available on its website a policy template that local law enforcement agencies can use as a model for their ALPR policies.
- To require DOJ to develop and issue guidance to help local law enforcement agencies identify and evaluate the types of data they are currently storing in their ALPR systems.
- To establish a maximum data retention period for ALPR images.
- To specify how frequently ALPR system use must be audited and that the audits must include assessing user searches.

In October 2023, the DOJ issued guidance to state and local law enforcement agencies regarding the governance of ALPRs, asserting that California law prohibits ALPR information from being shared with federal agencies or local agencies outside of the state of California. The bulletin included a template use policy that recommended law enforcement agencies maintain ALPR data for 60 days to six months.

Proposed Law: SB 1013 would require ALPR operators and end-users to enhance reasonable security procedures by limiting access to ALPR systems and requiring data security and data privacy training for employees with access to those systems.

Specifically, this bill would:

- Exclude a public transit operator, a local department of transportation or public works department, and an airport or airport operator from the definitions of “ALPR operator” and “ALPR end-user,” as specified.
- Exclude a transportation agency, a public transit operator, and a local department of transportation or public works department from the definition of “public agency” when subject to certain provisions related to red light cameras, speed cameras, toll collection, and transit operator parking enforcement, as specified.
- Expand the current requirements for ALPR operators and end-users to maintain reasonable security procedures and practices to also require them to include:
 - Safeguards for managing which employees can see the data from their systems, including requiring supervisory approval, robust authentication protocols for establishing an account to access an ALPR system, and tracking searches of ALPR information made by employees.
 - Requirements for data security training and data privacy training for all employees that access ALPR information, as specified.
- Require the usage and privacy policies to indicate the purpose for which specified employees and contractors are granted access to, and permission to use, ALPR information.
- Require DOJ, subject to an appropriation of sufficient funding in the annual Budget Act, to conduct annual random audits on a public agency that is an ALPR operator or end-user to determine whether they have implemented and are adhering to a usage and privacy policy in compliance with specified statutory requirements.
- Prohibit a public agency from retaining ALPR information that does not match information on a “hot list” for more than 30 days after the date of collection. As of January 1, 2027, a public agency must, within 14 days, delete all information that has been held for more than 30 days and does not match information on an authorized hot list.
- Define a “hot list” as a list or lists of license plates of vehicles of interest against which ALPR system is comparing vehicles on the roadways. Authorized hot lists are limited to the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) list, the Stolen Vehicle System (SVS), California Department of Justice lists, official alerts (i.e. AMBER, Silver, etc.), and custom BOLO lists that pertain solely to missing and at-risk persons, witness locations, burglaries, grand theft, and violent crimes.
- Require an ALPR record to include a case file number that justifies a search query, which is prohibited without a log entry with a valid and current case file number from the agency conducting the query, except as specified.
- Require, beginning January 1, 2027, all new, updated, expansions of, or addendums of contractual agreements with ALPR vendors, manufacturers, or suppliers to mandate that no default access is provided to any national ALPR database and that an agency’s collected scans are by default not accessible to any other agency.
- Specify that ALPR information may only be used by law enforcement for purposes of locating vehicles or persons when either are reasonably suspected of being involved in the commission of a public offense.

Related Legislation: SB 274 (Cervantes), which was vetoed by Governor Newsom last year, was nearly identical to this bill except that bill included a 60-day retention period for ALPR data, rather than 30 days. The veto message included the following:

“this measure does not strike the delicate balance between protecting individual privacy and ensuring public safety. For example, it may not be apparent, particularly with respect to cold cases, that license plate data is needed to solve a crime until after the 60-day retention period has elapsed. Conversely, restrictions on inter-agency data sharing may impair solving crimes in real time, such as highway shootings, where the suspect may be rapidly crossing jurisdictional boundaries. Further, by restricting law enforcement agencies' use of ALPR information only for locating persons or vehicles suspected of involvement in crimes, this bill would prevent the use of this information to locate missing persons.

This bill also creates cost pressures, which are not accounted for in this year's budget, by requiring the Department of Justice to conduct random audits of public entities in order to ensure compliance with this bill... With significant fiscal pressures and the federal government's hostile economic policies, it is vital that we remain disciplined when considering bills with significant fiscal implications that are not included in the budget”

SB 34 (Hill), Chap. 532/2015, required ALPR operators and end-users to maintain reasonable security procedures and practices to protect ALPR information from unauthorized access, destruction, use, modification, or disclosure. The bill also required ALPR operators and end-users to implement usage and privacy policies to ensure consistency with respect for individuals' privacy and civil liberties.

Staff Comments: While this bill would impose new requirements and costs on local agencies that are ALPR operators or end-users, it is unclear whether these costs would be subject to state-reimbursement. As the usage of ALPR systems is not a mandated activity on local agencies, any costs related to the implementation of additional security, privacy, and access protocols and procedures may not be state-reimbursable. In other words, the use of ALPR systems is an optional activity by local agencies, so any additional requirements related to those systems may not be construed to be state-reimbursable mandated activities. However, whether the costs to local agencies would be subject to reimbursement by the state cannot be known with certainty, and would ultimately be subject to determination by the Commission on State Mandates, should a local agency file a test claim. Staff notes that it does not appear that the original requirements imposed on ALPR operators and end-users by the enactment of SB 34 (Hill, 2015) resulted in a determination by the Commission that local costs are subject to state-reimbursement.

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