| | |
|---|---|
| **From:** | Joshua Smith |
| **To:** | Brooks, Desley; McElhaney, Lynette; Kalb, Dan; Gallo, Noel; Schaaf, Libby; At Large; Reid, Larry; Kernighan, Pat |
| **Subject:** | DHS cancels national license-plate tracking plan (Feb. 19, 2014) |
| **Date:** | Wednesday, February 19, 2014 5:04:35 PM |

http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/dhs-cancels-national-license-plate-tracking-plan/2014/02/19/a4c3ef2e-99b4-11e3-b931-0204122c514b_print.html

---

# Department of Homeland Security cancels national license-plate tracking plan

Washington Post • February 19, 2014

Homeland Security Secretary Jeh Johnson on Wednesday ordered the cancellation of a plan by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement agency to develop a national license-plate tracking system after privacy advocates raised concern about the initiative.

The order came just days after ICE solicited proposals from companies to compile a database of license-plate information from commercial and law enforcement tag readers. Officials said the database was intended to help apprehend fugitive illegal immigrants, but the plan raised concerns that the movements of ordinary citizens under no criminal suspicion could be scrutinized.

The data would have been drawn from readers that scan the tags of every vehicle crossing their paths, and would have been accessed only for "ongoing criminal investigations or to locate wanted individuals," officials told The Washington Post this week.

"The solicitation, which was posted without the awareness of ICE leadership, has been cancelled," ICE spokeswoman Gillian Christensen said in a statement. "While we continue to support a range of technologies to help meet our law enforcement mission, this solicitation will be reviewed to ensure the path forward appropriately meets our operational needs."

Lawmakers and privacy advocates reacted with approval.

The fact that the solicitation was posted without knowledge of ICE leadership "highlights a serious management problem within this DHS component that currently does not have a director nominated by the president," Rep. Bennie G. Thompson (Miss.), the ranking Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, said in a statement. He added that he hopes officials will consult with the department's privacy and civil liberties officers in the future.

Harley Geiger, senior counsel at the nonprofit Center for Democracy & Technology, welcomed the decision to cancel plans for the database. It was to be designed to allow agents to snap a photo of a license plate, upload it to a smartphone and compare it against a "hot list" of plates in the database, among other features. But, Geiger noted, "they didn't say, 'Hey, contractor, you must also be capable of providing privacy protections.' "

The ICE solicitation stated that the database should comply with the Privacy Act of 1974.

But, Geiger said, “the Privacy Act protections are quite weak, especially because they have loads of exemptions for law enforcement.”

Catherine Crump, a staff attorney at the American Civil Liberties Union, said that “while it is good news that DHS has canceled the solicitation, there are many other law enforcement agencies around the country that are already accessing these vast private databases of plate data.”

She urged “a broader conversation about what privacy restrictions should be put in place when the government wishes to access information on Americans’ movements that stretches back for years and has the potential to paint a detailed picture of our daily lives.” She said, “The overwhelming majority of people who are caught up by these devices are completely innocent of any wrongdoing.”