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Mass. moves to trim stockpile of electronic toll records

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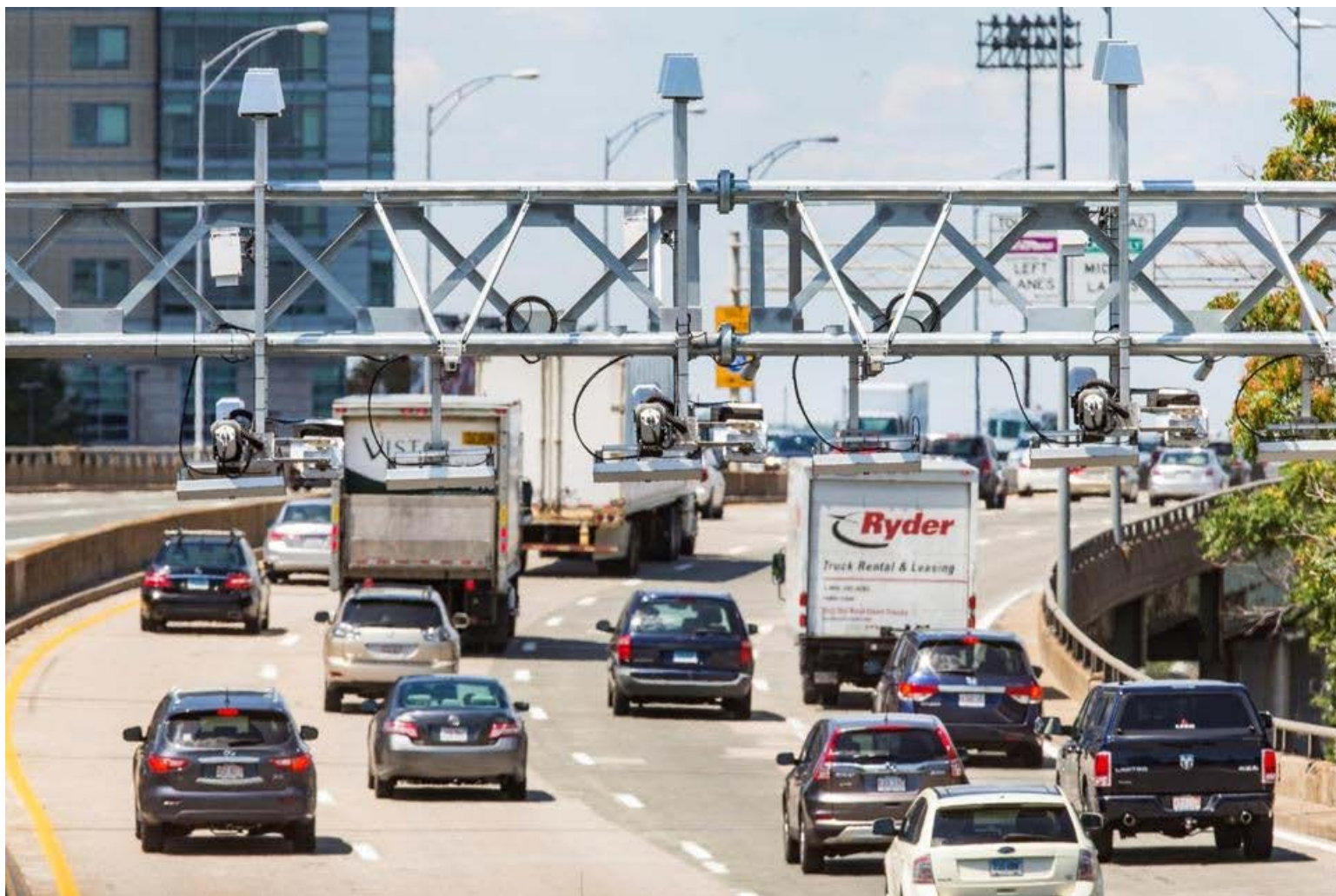
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ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE

MassDOT has stored billions of toll records, covering every E-ZPass and Fast Lane tollbooth transaction for the past 18 years. Now, it wants to reduce the massive stockpile.

By **Matt Rocheleau**

GLOBE STAFF OCTOBER 05, 2016

The state Department of Transportation has stored billions of toll records, covering every E-ZPass and Fast Lane tollbooth transaction for the past 18 years. Now, it wants to reduce the massive stockpile.

The agency is seeking to delete records it no longer needs. And it is proposing standards for how long to keep them going forward, addressing privacy concerns as it prepares to deploy a new all-electronic tolling system later this month.

“Better late than never,” said Kade Crockford, director of the Technology for Liberty Project at the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts.

The state [Records Conservation Board](#) on Wednesday approved MassDOT keeping customer information for as long as an account is open, and for one year after it closes. The board also approved retention of seven years of toll transactions, including the location, date, time, license plate, and transponder number for each.



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The little-known board sets standards for the management and preservation of government records in Massachusetts. State agencies are forbidden to destroy records without its approval.



State wants to keep data for 30 days on how fast you drive

MassDOT wants to keep data for 30 days on how fast people drive under the Massachusetts Turnpike's new all-electronic toll gantries.

"It's an opportunity to clean up everything," said Stephen Collins, director of statewide tolling for MassDOT.

Collins said agency officials recently realized no policy had ever been created for how long to keep records collected under the existing electronic tolling system. So all the data has been kept since 1998, when the system was named Fast Lane.

"The previous administrations didn't have a records retention policy in place, so therefore those records are continuing to be maintained," he said.

It wasn't immediately clear Wednesday exactly how many electronic tolling records the department has, but Collins acknowledged it's a huge amount of data, and includes some cumbersome paper records.



MassDOT reports show that from January 2009 through this past August alone, the department recorded more than 1.35 billion electronic toll transactions, most of them from the Massachusetts Turnpike.

Officials could not immediately say how much it has cost to store those records.

The ACLU's Crockford said toll records can paint detailed pictures of drivers' routines.

"It can reveal a whole lot more about us than people might assume," she said. "The longer information like this accumulates in a database, the more sensitive it becomes."

"We hope this is the beginning of a conversation not just with MassDOT, but with other state agencies that handle sensitive information. It should be regular practice for a state agency to hash out policies like these before the records system is created," she said.

The state records board also approved a MassDOT proposal to retain for 30 days vehicle speed data that will be collected by the new all-electronic tolling system.

Under the new system, which begins later this month, drivers will no longer have to stop, or even slow down, to pay tolls. Instead, vehicles with E-ZPass transponders will be charged automatically when they pass under sensors installed on toll gantries over the road. Vehicles without transponders will have their license plates photographed by cameras mounted on the gantries, and a bill will be mailed to car owners.

MassDOT officials have said that speed data needs to be gathered to synchronize the new tolling system's cameras so they can snap photos of license plates as cars whiz by.

They have also said they are storing speed data, without identifying information, for research purposes. They've stressed there is no plan to use the information to punish speeding motorists.

The storage of that data also raised concerns from privacy activists.

But Collins explained that the department wants to keep speed data for 30 days in case it needs to use the data to make sure the electronic tolling equipment is working properly, to ensure drivers are billed correctly, and in case of an audit.

"We believe [30 days] is enough time to form the transaction and then have an opportunity, if the

time arises, to audit the transactions if needed,” he said.

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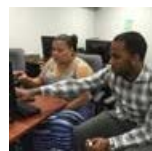
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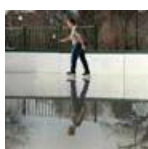
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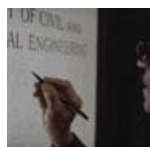


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