

Next  
Score

**Easy To Use, All in One, CRM.**

1.5 Million Insightly CRM users worldwide.

**insightly**

TRY FOR FREE



# State used car-tracking tech seven times last year, but got no hits

E-MAIL

FACEBOOK

TWITTER

GOOGLE

LINKEDIN

28



ARAM BOGHOSIAN FOR THE BOSTON GLOBE/FILE 2016

**A “hot list” feature on the turnpike is capable of alerting law enforcement officials when cars with specified license plates or transponders pass under toll gantries.**

By [Matt Rocheleau](#)

GLOBE STAFF AUGUST 10, 2017

When the state introduced all-electronic tolling last year, it included a controversial “hot list” feature, capable of alerting law enforcement when cars with specified license plates or transponders pass under toll gantries.

State officials say they have activated that feature seven times since last fall — in a variety of cases from murders to abductions — including during an [Amber Alert Wednesday](#) night. But not once has the technology yielded a hit or spotted a vehicle on the list.

In one case, the authorities were looking for a convict who had escaped from federal prison in Rhode Island. In another, police were pursuing a suspect wanted in connection with a double murder. On Wednesday, they were searching for a 3-year-old who was allegedly kidnapped in Worcester by her mother.

ADVERTISEMENT



Homeowners Born Before 1985  
Get A Big Pay Day

[Learn More](#)

Public safety officials said they believe the lack of hits came because the vehicles that police were looking for never passed through any tolls. The technology itself, they said, does not appear to have failed.

Get Fast Forward in your inbox:

Forget yesterday's news. Get what you need today in this early-morning email.

Sign Up

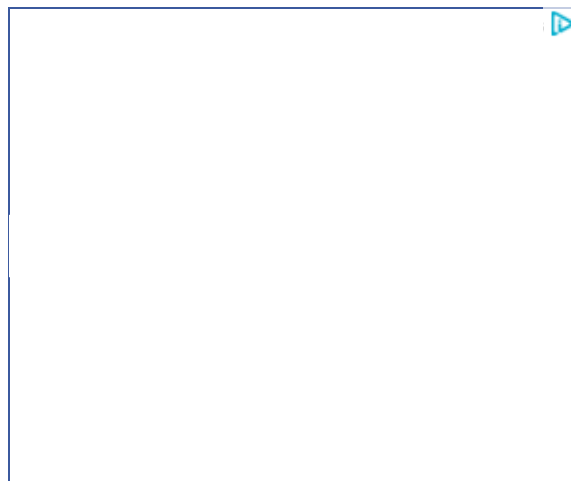
Here's how the system works: When law enforcement officials want to find a particular vehicle, they ask transportation officials to add the vehicle's license plate or transponder number to the "hot list." Whenever a vehicle on that list passes under a toll-collection gantry, an e-mail alert is automatically sent to officials within seconds.

Though the technology has yet to yield results, State Police spokesman David Procopio said "the hot list capability is a helpful tool for law enforcement agencies."

But the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts says it worries that in some cases law enforcement officials also requested historical toll records — dating back hours or even days — for listed vehicles, without getting a court order. Hot list cases are the only ones where toll records can be obtained without an order.

This isn't the first time the group has raised concerns. Last year, the ACLU, along with [lawmakers](#), said it feared that the technology would invade drivers' privacy.

ADVERTISEMENT



In response, state transportation and public safety officials drafted [regulations](#) saying the hot list would be used only for emergencies involving an "imminent and immediate threat to the safety, health, and well-being of an individual or the public."

The Globe, via a public records request, obtained a list of e-mails and other documents related to hot list requests over the last year, which together indicate the technology has been reserved for only the

most serious types of incidents.

The cases included:

On Jan. 1, officials activated the service while police were hunting for an escaped prisoner and a stolen car. Officials said the man in question was James W. Morales, who was discovered missing from a federal prison in Rhode Island on New Year's Eve and was [captured](#) after a dramatic five-day manhunt.

On the morning of Feb. 23, officials requested a hot list activation for a license plate connected to a suspect in in a double murder and carjacking. Officials would not say more about the case, but at the time, [police were searching](#) for a man wanted in connection with a double murder in Peabody on Feb. 18 and with an alleged carjacking of a man in Middleton. The suspect was later was [arrested](#) in South Carolina and brought back to Massachusetts to face charges.

ADVERTISEMENT





Homeowners Born Before 1985  
Get A Big Pay Day

[Learn More](#)

□ On March 18, officials used the service to search for a New Hampshire license plate of someone wanted for armed kidnapping, attempted murder, and arson. Public records e-mails say the suspect was later taken into custody in New York.

□ On the morning of June 1, officials listed a Massachusetts license plate in connection with the murder and robbery of an elderly woman. “Suspect at large and victim’s vehicle missing,” one e-mail said. Officials would not provide more information about that case, but on May 31, an 81-year-old woman was [found](#) murdered in her Needham apartment. Authorities issued a bulletin for her missing car, which was found days later. Her 47-year-old neighbor was later [charged](#) in the murder and in stealing the car.



□ On July 7, the hot list was activated in a hunt for a suspect in a murder and workplace shooting, officials said. They would not provide further information, but on July 5, a man murdered his girlfriend in Wendell, then drove to his workplace in Chicopee and shot a co-worker, [authorities said at the time](#). A manhunt ensued, and police issued a bulletin for a car he was believed to be driving. He was stopped by police in that car and [arrested](#) July 9 in Orange.

□ On Aug. 3, State Police working with Kingston police requested a hot list search for a Silver Alert case involving a vehicle last seen around South Boston on the morning of Aug. 1. Silver Alerts are emergency notifications broadcast to the public when someone with dementia goes missing.

□ On [Wednesday night](#), officials said, the hot list was used to try to find a woman who had allegedly kidnapped her 3-year-old daughter in Worcester, triggering an Amber Alert, the warning that comes

when a child has been abducted. State Police tracked her down in Charlton. She was scheduled to be arraigned on charges, including attempted murder, Thursday.

Officials also said that one additional request to activate the hot list, on Feb. 1, was denied, but they did not say why.

A year into the program, privacy advocates say they are also concerned about the use of private contractors to assist in the searches.

E-mails show that in at least some of the cases state officials relied on contractors to handle the sensitive duty of searching for past toll records in cases when a vehicle was added to the hot list.

“Contractors have access to extremely sensitive information showing where motorists have driven,” said Kade Crockford, director of the Technology for Liberty Project at the ACLU of Massachusetts. “MassDOT should perform regular audits on every contractor and internal employee with access to these sensitive records.”

A state transportation spokesman said the private companies — [Raytheon Corp.](#), which the state hired to install all-electronic tolling on the turnpike, and [TTI Consulting](#), a private tolling-specialty firm — can search the toll records database by virtue of their respective roles.

Both companies “are MassDOT’s vendors. As such, they are authorized to search the database only when requested to do so by MassDOT and only in accordance with applicable regulations,” spokesman Patrick Marvin said in an e-mail.

Marvin added, however, that activating the hot list feature is done “solely by MassDOT staff,” and the department “utilizes the ‘Hot List’ only in accordance with the applicable regulations.”

Crockford said the biggest concern remains the fact that in some cases, law enforcement officials are requesting historical toll records without a court order.

“The hot list should only be used for public safety emergencies, and querying information about a driver’s past movements doesn’t seem to qualify as an emergency,” Crockford said.

*Matt Rocheleau can be reached at [matthew.rocheleau@globe.com](mailto:matthew.rocheleau@globe.com). Follow him on Twitter [@mrochele](#).*

SHOW 28 COMMENTS

---

## Most Popular In Metro →

---



### House washed away by New Hampshire river after storm

People along the river bank watched in astonishment as a house in Warren, N.H., was carried away by a choppy river before smashing into a nearby bridge. [MORE...](#)

---



### Storm blasts state, leaving nearly 300,000 without power

Buffeting winds and curtains of rain toppled trees early Monday morning, turning streets into rushing waterways and cut power to thousands. [MORE...](#)

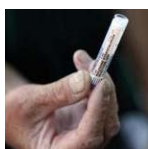
---



### Here's where all that wind is coming from

We went from almost no wind on Sunday morning to gusts of near 70 miles per hour early Monday in some places. [MORE...](#)

---



### 10 percent revived by Narcan in Mass. died within year, study says

The research provides stark evidence that merely reversing overdoses will not curb the opioid crisis. [MORE...](#)

---



### William Lantigua is attempting a comeback in Lawrence — and it might work

It's been four years since former Mayor Willie Lantigua lost his seat. Now, he has returned from political exile — and he is very much in the race. [MORE...](#)

---



### Damage from overnight storm was widespread

Photos shared at daybreak showed the damage left after a storm swept through the New England area. [MORE...](#)



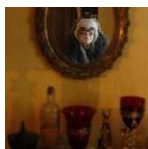
## Indonesians threatened with deportation after years living in New Hampshire

“Please, President Trump, please. . . Don’t send me home. I have family here.” [MORE...](#)



## Women describe climate of harassment at Mass. State House

A dozen women who have worked in and around the State House over the past two decades described a climate of harassment and sexual misconduct. [MORE...](#)



## She brought magic to Salem. She has mixed feelings about it

The chaos that is Salem at Halloween all began 47 years ago with a witch, a black cat, and a call to the local newspaper. [MORE...](#)



## Who are Paul Manafort, Rick Gates, and George Papadopoulos?

Two men who worked on President Donald Trump’s campaign were indicted Monday and a third pleaded guilty to lying to federal agents. [MORE...](#)



## Are the days of free residential parking in Boston numbered?

A key city councilor wants to at least talk about it. [MORE...](#)



## Boston is one of the best big cities in the US, according to Conde Nast Traveler readers

Boston’s art, sports, food, and historic sites make it one of the best big cities in America, say Conde Nast Traveler readers. [MORE...](#)



## New MBTA chief urges board to hold off on plan for late-night service

Luis Ramirez asked the board to wait on approving buses that would run past the end of regular service. [MORE...](#)

## Chemical fire in truck causes lane closures on I-495 in Andover





All three northbound lanes on I-495 remained closed as of about 3:15 p.m., and the closures could continue for several more hours. [MORE...](#)



## Here are the best places to go trick-or-treating in Boston, according to the city

For those without a tangible plan, fear not: Boston has released a list of the best places and times for some candy-grabbing fun. [MORE...](#)



## Nearly 1.5 million across New England were without power following storm

Some utility companies warned customers that power could be out for a few days. [MORE...](#)



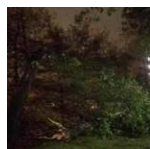
## Want to render hate speech powerless? Ignore it

A rightwing rally that is planned on Boston Common next month is a great chance to pay no attention. [MORE...](#)



## Mass. Senate passes sweeping criminal justice bill after emotional debate

The bill aims to reduce the number of people ensnared in the thicket of the criminal justice system and ease the tough-on-crime approach of decades past. Prosecutors are crying foul. [MORE...](#)



## What you're seeing on the ground during the storm

Thousands are without power as a strong storm moves through Massachusetts. [MORE...](#)

### Top 10 Trending Articles

Most Viewed

Most Commented

Most Shared

Sarah Sanders starts press briefing with a lengthy story abo...

Former Channel 5 anchor Heather Unruh tweets about Kevi...

Is the George Papadopoulos case the real bombshell today?

The huge significance of the Papadopoulos plea deal

---

[Netflix says it will end 'House of Cards'](#)

---

[Sizing up some possible Patriots trade targets](#)

SPONSORED BY LG



**Stainless steel is out. Black is in.**

..  
It's new, it's sleek, and it matches just about everything. Black appliances are in vogue, and coming to a kitchen near you. [MORE...](#)

[My Account](#)

[Manage my Account](#)

---

[Read the indictment against Paul Manafort](#)

[Mobile Customer Service](#)

---

[Sign Up For Newsletters](#)

**Contact**

[Help](#)

---

[FAQs](#)

---

[Globe newsroom](#)

---

[Advertise](#)

**Social**

[Facebook](#)

---

[Twitter](#)

---

[Google+](#)

**More**

[ePaper](#)

---

[News in Education](#)

---

[Archives](#)

---

[Privacy policy](#)

---

[Terms of service](#)

---

Terms of purchase

---

Work at Boston Globe Media

---

© 2017 Boston Globe Media Partners, LLC