



Freedom of Information request ref 01/FOI/25/3303
We received your request on the 08/04/2025.

Request

You asked us:

Dear British Transport Police,

I write to request information and records under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), regarding the use of facial recognition technology.

Questions 1-6 relate to the period from January 2023 to present.

1. Has British Transport Police deployed live facial recognition?
 - a. Please provide dates and locations for each deployment.
2. Has British Transport Police used any form of retrospective facial recognition?
 - a. Please specify whether this is via the Police National Database (PND), any other database, or a combination.
 - b. If any database other than the PND was accessed for the purposes of retrospective facial recognition, please specify the database(s) and the number of searches that have been conducted.
3. Has British Transport Police deployed operator initiated facial recognition?
 - a. Please provide dates and locations for each deployment.
4. Has British Transport Police deployed any form of facial recognition in conjunction with body-worn video?
 - a. Please provide dates and locations for each deployment.
5. Where live facial recognition has been used:
 - a. How many individuals were on the watchlist used in each instance?
 - b. How many of those on the watchlist were not wanted for arrest in each instance?
 - c. For what reasons were these people included?
6. At each deployment, how many alerts were generated?
 - a. How many of these were true alerts (confirmed and unconfirmed) and how many were false alerts (confirmed and unconfirmed)?
 - b. Please provide the engagement outcomes for each deployment, showing how many resulted in arrest, other disposal, or no action.
7. Does British Transport Police plan to deploy live facial recognition?
 - a. If so, please specify dates and locations of any planned trials or deployments.
8. Does British Transport Police plan to deploy operator initiated facial recognition?

a. If so, please specify dates and locations of any planned trials or deployments.

9. Please provide any internal policy document, guidelines or legal basis governing British Transport Police's use of facial recognition technology, including any Data Protection Impact Assessment.

If providing this information would trigger the cost exemption, please let me know as soon as possible, and I will refine my request. If this request is unclear, I would be grateful if you could contact me, and I will clarify. I understand that under FOIA you are required to advise and assist requesters. If any of this information is already in the public domain, please direct me to it.

I understand that you may redact exempted information in documents, but ask that you show where redactions have been made and give the justification, and remind you that the time taken for redactions does not usually contribute towards the cost cap under FOIA.

I look forward to your response within 20 working days.

We have handled your request under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

Our response:

1. No
1(a) N/A
2. (a) & (b) BTP use Retrospective Facial Recognition through PND.
3. No
3(a) N/A
4. BTP do not use live facial recognition in conjunction with body worn video. There may be occasion when we would use a still image from body-worn video and submit it for retrospective facial recognition testing however, this is not routine and would be on a case by case basis. An example may be where an officer has been assaulted by an unknown suspect who has subsequently fled the scene prior to arrest. We may use an image of the suspect from body-worn video during the course of an investigation.
5. (a),(b) & (c): N/A
6. (a) & (b): N/A
7. BTP actively ensures the organisation is sighted on developments in policing that supports the location and detection of known offenders. Live Facial Recognition is an area that is being reviewed for its effectiveness and suitability to support our policing objectives.
- 7 (a): None currently identified.
- 8 BTP actively ensures the organisation is sighted on developments in policing that supports the location and detection of known offenders. Operator Initiated Facial Recognition is an area that is being reviewed for its effectiveness and suitability to support our policing objectives.
- 8 (a): None currently identified.
9. Our retrospective facial recognition policy is currently being created

Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) places two duties on public authorities. Unless exemptions apply, the first duty at Section 1(1)(a) is to confirm or deny whether the information specified in a request is held. The second duty at Section 1(1)(b) is to disclose information that has been confirmed as being held. Where exemptions are relied upon Section 17 of the FOIA requires that we provide the applicant with a notice which:

- a) states that fact

- b) specifies the exemption(s) in question and
- c) states (if that would not otherwise be apparent) why the exemption applies.

In relation to this request, British Transport Police can neither confirm nor deny whether any further information is held by virtue of the following exemptions:

Section 30(3) – Investigations

Section 31(3) – Law Enforcement

Section 30(3) – Investigations

Section 30 is a class based qualified exemption and a public interest test must be considered.

Factors favouring confirming or denying whether any other information is held for Section 30

Confirming or denying that any information exists would lead to a better informed public, leading to greater transparency around the process of police investigations generally.

Factors against confirming or denying whether any other information is held for Section 30

It would not be in the public interest to disclose details of how crimes are investigated if it were to affect the ability of the Police to detect and investigate crimes. Confirming or denying that any other information relating to the practice of facial recognition is held would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal/terrorist activities.

Confirming or denying information is held regarding the specific circumstances in which the Police Service may or may not deploy the use of facial recognition would lead to an increase of harm to covert operations and compromise law enforcement. This would be to the detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

Balance test

The public interest in these circumstances does not support confirming whether any information is held by British Transport Police in relation to the matter described.

None of the above can be viewed as an inference that the information you seek does or does not exist.

Section 31(3)- Law Enforcement

Any disclosure under FOI is a release to the public at large. Whilst not questioning the motives of the applicant, confirming or denying that any other information relating to the practice of facial recognition is held would show criminals what the capacity, tactical abilities and capabilities of the force are, allowing them to target specific areas of the UK to conduct their criminal/terrorist activities.

Confirming or denying information is held regarding the specific circumstances in which the Police Service may or may not deploy the use of facial recognition would lead to an increase of harm to covert operations and compromise law enforcement. This would be to the

detriment of providing an efficient policing service and a failure in providing a duty of care to all members of the public.

The threat from terrorism cannot be ignored. It is generally recognised that the international security landscape is increasingly complex and unpredictable. Since 2006, the UK Government has published the threat level, based upon current intelligence and that threat is currently categorised as 'substantial', see below link:

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>

The UK continues to face a sustained threat from violent extremists and terrorists. It is well established that police forces use covert tactics and surveillance to gain intelligence in order to counteract criminal behaviour. It has been previously documented in the media that many terrorist incidents have been thwarted due to intelligence gained by these means.

Confirming or denying whether any other information is or isn't held relating to the covert use of facial recognition technology would limit operational capabilities as criminals/terrorists would gain a greater understanding of the police's methods and techniques, enabling offenders to take steps to counter them. It may also suggest the limitations of police capabilities in this area, which may further encourage criminal/terrorist activity by exposing potential vulnerabilities. This detrimental effect is increased if the request is made to several different law enforcement bodies.

In addition to the local criminal fraternity now being better informed, those intent on organised crime throughout the UK will be able to 'map' where the use of certain tactics are or are not deployed. This can be useful information to those committing crimes. It would have the likelihood of identifying location-specific operations which would ultimately compromise police tactics, operations and future prosecutions as criminals could counteract the measures used against them.

Any information identifying the focus of policing activity could be used to the advantage of terrorists or criminal organisations. Information that undermines the operational integrity of these activities will adversely affect public safety and have a negative impact on both National Security and Law Enforcement.

Therefore, it is our position that for these issues the balancing test for confirming or denying whether any other information is held is not made out.

However, this should not be taken as necessarily indicating that any further information that would meet your request exists or does not exist.