Boston dumps Flock, says it shared data nationwide in violation of contract

“An EFF analysis of ALPR search logs from Flock Safety systems shows that officers across the country are spying on drivers for completely nonsensical ‘reasons,’” the EFF wrote. “Police are routinely searching the Flock database without providing any legitimate justification, making a mockery of our civil liberties by logging reasons like ‘LOL’ (short for ‘laugh out loud’), ‘LMAO’ (short for ‘laughing my ass off’), ‘sexy,’ and ‘idk’ (short for ‘I don’t know’) to access sensitive ALPR location data.”

The EFF wrote that “Flock Safety claims it has improved its system by requiring officers to select from a dropdown list of crimes before running a search,” but the new system in place since late 2025 “does not require proof that the dropdown reason actually matches the true purpose of the search.”

Boston will keep using cameras, just not Flock’s

When asked if the city will keep using license-plate cameras as long as there are appropriate constraints, Wu replied, “Yes, we need a publicly approved and authorized policy to guarantee all of those protections, privacy, civil liberties, and if that’s in place, then we should deploy technology to be able to keep people safe and solve crimes faster.”

Boston’s annual report said the city requires vendors to agree not to share license-plate-reader data and to erase recordings

after 30 days unless police request that video be retained for legal or investigative purposes.

“The police department has been piloting different versions [of the technology] to better understand where vehicles might be going,” Wu said. City officials need to “know exactly who can access that data, how it will be retained, how long will it be saved for,” she said.

“It can really help with safety in a lot of ways, but it has to be used responsibly,” Wu said. “When the toggles or the access controls either are not able to be restricted in the ways that conform with that policy, or are set but then can be unset or reset in ways that violate that policy, we would not use that platform.”

As we wrote last month, cities have been dropping Flock at an accelerating pace “over concerns regarding out-of-control surveillance, unwanted data sharing, high expenses, and reports of police abusing the tool.” However, the company told Ars at the time that, “so far in 2026, new city partnerships have outpaced nonrenewals by approximately 10 to 1.” We contacted Flock today about the Boston city report and will update this article if it provides a response.

https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2026/09/boston-dumps-flock-says-it-shared-data-nationwide-in-violation-of-contract/