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LAPD security cameras focus on Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima

By Dakota Smith, Staff Writer

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LAPD officer Shawn Rumenapp runs the control panel in the LAPD Foothill station where the new surveillance cameras are being monitored. The cameras, which show areas along Van Nuys Blvd., went into service in October. (David Crane / Daily News Staff Photographer)

The cameras mounted atop light poles on Van Nuys Boulevard capture everyday life in Pacoima: A white Chevy pulling into a liquor store parking lot, a speeding black Saab, gunning to make a yellow light, and a young man on his phone, strolling toward a laundromat. [MORE PHOTOS](#)

The watchful electronic eyes come courtesy of the Los Angeles Police Department, which recently installed eight new security cameras on a two-mile stretch of Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima between the Golden State (5) Freeway and Foothill Boulevard.

The cameras, installed in October, are a

preventive measure to deter crime, according to City Councilman Richard Alarcón, who led the initiative for street surveillance.

While some studies suggest otherwise, city officials believe that criminals are less likely to commit acts of vandalism or violence if they know cameras are watching.

Additionally, the \$300,000 camera system, installed in October and paid for with Community Redevelopment Agency funds, will stretch the capabilities of the LAPD, said Alarcón.

"When revenue is down, we have to be smarter about fighting crime with what we have," Alarcón said.

Camera operators can zoom in and take a photo of a suspect or a screen grab of a car's license plate.

The real-time film footage will be monitored by the watch commander at the Foothill Area division, as well as

by community volunteers. It will be kept for 30 days and can be used in court cases.

The LAPD already has cameras in place in the its Southwest L.A. and Mission divisions, as well as

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in other neighborhoods.

But not everyone is fan of the security measures.

Worried about privacy issues, the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California urged city officials three years ago to shut down more than 100 cameras used to monitor Los Angeles neighborhoods.

Executives at the ACLU pointed to a University of Southern California study stating that lighting streets is more of a crime deterrent than cameras.

The ACLU's position hasn't changed, according to Diana Rubio, media relations manager for the ACLU of Southern California.

"The privacy issue does come up," said Capt. Joseph Hiltner. "But these are public areas. These are places where this is no expectation of privacy."

Already, he adds, the cameras helped lead to the arrest of a suspect in a string of vandalism incidents in the area.

Pacoima resident Edwin Ramirez, a community activist who leads a neighborhood watch group on his street, says there's been half a dozen improvements in the neighborhood in the last decade.

More bus benches now line Van Nuys Boulevard and the city has cracked down on the proliferation of bars along the boulevard. The cameras are just another improvement, he believes, in an area that doesn't have a lot of foot traffic.

"This will help the security of the little businesses," he said.



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