

New Police "Eyes" in Pacoima



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Eight Cameras Now Help Fight Crime Along Van Nuys Corridor



Despite a 15 percent drop in crime in the Pacoima area this past year, authorities are hoping to bring that number even lower with the installation of eight cameras in crime-heavy areas of this jurisdiction.

"This is an extra piece of crime-fighting strategy that will help us with crime and gang activity that have occurred along the Van Nuys Corridor," said Capt. Joseph Hiltner of the Los Angeles Police Department, Foothill Division, during a press conference early Monday morning.

The cameras, placed about 100 ft. up on light posts, have been set up at different intersections from the 5 Freeway all the way to Foothill Boulevard. They offer 360-degree views and can identify faces and license plates up to 600 ft. The project has a cost of \$360,000 paid for by money from the Community Redevelopment Agency.

The wireless surveillance camera system runs 24/7. During the night and low-level light conditions they switch to black and white images, still allowing for clear viewing, said Jasper Bruinzeel of CelPlan, the company that installed the cameras.

All video is stored for 30 days in case police need to go back to check a particular incident or may need them to build a case. The cameras are monitored by a combination of police officers, reserves, and trained volunteers.

Officer Shawn Rumenapp is one of the officers who regularly monitors the cameras from a desk inside the Foothill Division. In front of him are several screens, a larger one on top and several others with all eight cameras scenes filling two smaller ones.

"If we see something that goes down, we can radio a patrol car and have them be there immediately," said Rumenapp, as he pointed at different intersections and the David Gonzales Park, where another camera is placed. "It can help us with stolen cars, drug sales and robberies."

"This is a preventative scheme that will get the community to reduce their speed and avoid crimes that might occur, or perhaps track them down after (criminals) leave the scene of a crime," said Los Angeles Councilmember Richard Alarcon.

Success Story

And this is exactly one of the "success stories" the police are crediting to the cameras.

Days after being implemented in October, police were able to partially identify and subsequently locate the suspect vehicle involved in a series of felony vandalism incidents including shooting out the windows of multiple businesses throughout the San Fernando Valley. One shooting took place along Van Nuys Boulevard in Pacoima and was captured on tape. Foothill Area detectives are now working on the case and expect to make an arrest.

"It's a force multiplier," said Capt. Hiltner, who pointed that the cameras are a much cheaper option than hiring new officers or patrol cars. "And it's something that can give a greater level of safety among residents and business owners."



No Invasion of Privacy

Invasion of privacy shouldn't be a concern, say authorities.

"The cameras are placed in public spaces where there is no expectation of privacy," Capt. Hiltner said.

"We haven't had any complaints in our offices," added Alarcon, noting that the cameras will help bring "better investigations."

Residents seemed split on their views of the cameras.

"As long as it is to reduce crime, that's fine. But they put traffic cameras and they didn't work out," said Lauro Jimenez, who received a \$350 fine from one of the defunct red-light cameras placed at Nordhoff Street and Van Nuys Boulevard, in Panorama City.

"If they're doing it to protect us and if they use it correctly instead of just taking money from us I think they will help," Jimenez added.

For his part, Angel de la Luz said he wasn't too keen on the idea of "big brother" watching over him and the rest of citizens all the time.

"I'm going to tell everybody to be on the lookout," said de la Luz. "I think it could also help when police say something happened this way and it didn't.

If they tell us to get away from somewhere, we have a right to know what's going on and they should let us see it after."

Foothill is the third LAPD division to install similar surveillance systems this year. Cameras are also placed in the area of Baldwin Hills in southwest Los Angeles and in Panorama City.

"The streets belong to the people. If you commit a crime in this area, we will likely catch it on tape and you will be prosecuted to the full extent of the law," Capt. Hiltner said.



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