



Police use license plate reader as investigative tool



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PORTAGE | Cruising down a city street Thursday afternoon, the Portage Police Department's newest tool honed in on license plates of nearby vehicles.

The automated license plate reading system installed in the 2007 unmarked squad car used its four cameras to electronically scan the license plates, adding new vehicles to its database and checking the plates with existing databases.

The system, which was installed about a month ago, cost \$31,255 and was funded through the city's Redevelopment Commission.

The system, said Cpl. Chris Kobitz, can provide officers with a myriad of information. As the cameras on the squad scan license plates of vehicles it passes, it can alert police to a vehicle that is stolen or to one that is associated with someone wanted or involved in a number of different crimes.

"It is just another investigative tool. I believe it will help detectives more than patrol," said Kobitz, adding that he believes it will be especially effective when someone reports a crime, but only has a partial plate for police to run. The partial plate number can be run and, if in the system, will pop up potential vehicles with their photographs.

As he drives, it builds up the local database. It is also connected with other databases and will soon be connected with the National Crime Information Center.

As the local database is built up, police will have access to more information that can help them apprehend suspects more quickly. For example, if police need to locate someone suspected in a crime, if that person's license plate is in the system, police will have information about where the suspect has been before, and will have a lead on where to look.

"It helps us locate people who are up to criminal activity," said Kobitz.