# Met to deploy live facial recognition at Notting Hill Carnival despite civil liberties backlash



The Metropolitan Police has confirmed it will deploy live facial recognition cameras at this year’s Notting Hill Carnival, saying the technology will be used without bias to help locate potentially dangerous individuals during the August bank‑holiday weekend. According to the force’s public briefing, around 7,000 officers and staff will be on duty each day and the cameras will be sited on approaches to and exits from the event, outside the carnival’s formal boundaries, with deployments described as intelligence‑led and intended to deter serious violence. (Metropolitan Police statement)

Civil society groups and campaigners have sharply criticised the decision. An open letter signed by eleven organisations — including Liberty, Runnymede Trust and Big Brother Watch — warned that live facial recognition is a “mass surveillance tool” that treats attendees as potential suspects and is “less accurate for women and people of colour”, arguing there is no clear legal basis for its use at a festival that celebrates the British African‑Caribbean community. Rebecca Vincent, interim director at Big Brother Watch, said she was “deeply disappointed” that the force had chosen to continue with the technology and urged the Met to abandon plans and focus on on‑the‑ground policing instead. (Campaign statements; Big Brother Watch press release)

The force has set out operational safeguards it says limit risks to privacy. The Met says the system will search bespoke watchlists — for example, people recorded as wanted on the Police National Computer, those who are missing and individuals subject to sexual‑harm prevention orders — and that biometric data from non‑matches will be deleted immediately. The force also stresses that camera use will be concentrated on entry and exit points rather than inside the carnival itself. (Metropolitan Police briefing; news reporting)

The decision follows a troubled history of facial recognition trials in London. The Met acknowledges that earlier deployments at the carnival in 2016 and 2017 “did not build public confidence”, and independent reporting has recorded that those trials produced a number of incorrect identifications with no resulting arrests; one high‑profile misidentification has since led to an ongoing legal challenge. The commissioner has argued the algorithm now in use has “significantly improved”, points to independent testing and says the system does not “perform in a way which exhibits bias”, but campaigners dispute those assurances and call for stronger oversight. (Metropolitan Police comments; The Guardian)

The debate over biometric surveillance is not confined to policing. Retail‑facing systems have seen a marked rise in automated alerts: the company Facewatch reported its highest monthly total of suspect alerts in July 2025, sending more than 43,000 alerts to subscriber stores — the equivalent, the company said, of over 10,000 suspects flagged each week. Facewatch’s chief executive, Nick Fisher, described the figures as “a further stark warning that retailers and their employees are facing unprecedented levels of criminal activity.” Privacy campaigners warn that the proliferation of such systems turns members of the public into “walking barcodes” and risks serious harms when mistakes occur. (Industry data; Facewatch statement; campaign commentary)

Critics say the Met’s assurances do not address the deeper legal and accountability questions raised by mass biometric capture. Several organisations that signed the open letter have argued there is no comprehensive statutory framework governing police use of live facial recognition in public settings, and have called for transparency about how watchlists are compiled, independent auditing of algorithms and clearer routes for redress when errors occur. The charities argue resources would be better directed at conventional policing measures that protect vulnerable people without sweeping up the privacy of thousands of innocent festival‑goers. (Civil society statements; campaign press releases)

The Met maintains its position that LFR deployments are a proportionate, intelligence‑led tool intended to protect the public and deter serious offending, while campaigners warn the move could exacerbate distrust between police and the communities the carnival celebrates unless transparency, legal clarity and independent oversight are secured. With a legal challenge still progressing and civil liberties groups pledging continued scrutiny, the dispute over facial recognition at one of London’s largest cultural events looks set to continue into the autumn. (Metropolitan Police briefing; campaign groups; legal reporting)

### 📌 Reference Map:

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/notting-hill-face-recognition-technology-will-be-used-without-bias-met-boss-AB3LE36LH5MQ7AY4VJYCYZOD5E/), [[4]](https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-appeals-for-publics-help-to-keep-carnival-safe-in-2025-499483)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/notting-hill-face-recognition-technology-will-be-used-without-bias-met-boss-AB3LE36LH5MQ7AY4VJYCYZOD5E/), [[5]](https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/press-releases/big-brother-watchs-response-to-facial-recognition-at-notting-hill-carnival/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/aug/19/met-chief-rejects-calls-scrap-live-facial-recognition-notting-hill-carnival)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-appeals-for-publics-help-to-keep-carnival-safe-in-2025-499483), [[3]](https://news.sky.com/story/face-recognition-tech-will-be-used-without-bias-at-festival-met-boss-says-13414828)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/notting-hill-face-recognition-technology-will-be-used-without-bias-met-boss-AB3LE36LH5MQ7AY4VJYCYZOD5E/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/aug/19/met-chief-rejects-calls-scrap-live-facial-recognition-notting-hill-carnival)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/notting-hill-face-recognition-technology-will-be-used-without-bias-met-boss-AB3LE36LH5MQ7AY4VJYCYZOD5E/), [[7]](https://www.expressandstar.com/news/science-and-technology/2025/08/19/facial-recognition-alerts-to-prevent-crime-in-uk-shops-hit-a-record-10000-every-week/)
* Paragraph 6 – [[5]](https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/press-releases/big-brother-watchs-response-to-facial-recognition-at-notting-hill-carnival/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/aug/19/met-chief-rejects-calls-scrap-live-facial-recognition-notting-hill-carnival)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-appeals-for-publics-help-to-keep-carnival-safe-in-2025-499483), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/aug/19/met-chief-rejects-calls-scrap-live-facial-recognition-notting-hill-carnival), [[5]](https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/press-releases/big-brother-watchs-response-to-facial-recognition-at-notting-hill-carnival/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/notting-hill-face-recognition-technology-will-be-used-without-bias-met-boss-AB3LE36LH5MQ7AY4VJYCYZOD5E/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.irishnews.com/news/uk/notting-hill-face-recognition-technology-will-be-used-without-bias-met-boss-AB3LE36LH5MQ7AY4VJYCYZOD5E/> - An Irish News report outlines Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley’s defence of using live facial recognition (LFR) at the Notting Hill Carnival, saying the technology will be employed without bias to help locate dangerous individuals. It notes an open letter from eleven civil liberties and anti‑racist groups, including Liberty and Big Brother Watch, which argued LFR is a mass surveillance tool and less accurate for women and people of colour. Rowley acknowledged earlier trials in 2016 and 2017 had undermined public confidence but said algorithms have improved. The piece also references Facewatch retail alert figures and criticism from campaigners.
3. <https://news.sky.com/story/face-recognition-tech-will-be-used-without-bias-at-festival-met-boss-says-13414828> - Sky News reports Sir Mark Rowley’s assertion that live facial recognition (LFR) will be deployed at Notting Hill Carnival in a non‑discriminatory way and that the technology has “significantly improved” since earlier trials. It describes a letter from eleven organisations including Liberty and Big Brother Watch criticising LFR as mass surveillance that disproportionately affects women and people of colour. Sky notes approximately 7,000 officers will be on duty each day, that LFR will search for individuals marked as wanted on the Police National Computer, and that Facewatch reported record retail alerts in July 2025, prompting concerns about biometric surveillance nationwide.
4. <https://news.met.police.uk/news/met-appeals-for-publics-help-to-keep-carnival-safe-in-2025-499483> - The Metropolitan Police’s official briefing sets out policing plans for Notting Hill Carnival 2025, announcing around 7,000 officers will be deployed each day and that live facial recognition (LFR) cameras will be used on approaches to and exits of the event, outside its boundaries. The release explains LFR searches bespoke watchlists to identify people marked as wanted on the Police National Computer, those who are missing, and individuals subject to sexual harm prevention orders, with immediate deletion of biometrics for non‑matches. It states deployments are intelligence‑led and part of measures to deter serious violence and protect attendees and the public.
5. <https://bigbrotherwatch.org.uk/press-releases/big-brother-watchs-response-to-facial-recognition-at-notting-hill-carnival/> - Big Brother Watch’s press release responded to plans for Metropolitan Police use of live facial recognition at Notting Hill Carnival and urged the force to abandon them. Interim director Rebecca Vincent warned the technology was invasive and “less accurate in scanning minority faces”, risking the targeting of the African‑Caribbean community the carnival celebrates. The charity criticised the lack of a clear legislative framework and called for stronger accountability, arguing mass biometric capture would not make London safer. The statement urged redirecting resources to on‑the‑ground policing to tackle offenders while protecting the privacy and civil liberties of innocent carnival‑goers.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2025/aug/19/met-chief-rejects-calls-scrap-live-facial-recognition-notting-hill-carnival> - The Guardian reports Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley rebutting calls to abandon live facial recognition at Notting Hill Carnival, saying the algorithm used “does not perform in a way which exhibits bias” and that the system has undergone independent testing. The piece details a letter from eleven civil liberties and anti‑racist organisations including Liberty, Runnymede Trust and Human Rights Watch, which warned LFR risks exacerbating racial discrimination. It recounts that previous trials in 2016 and 2017 produced 102 incorrect identifications with no arrests, and notes the ongoing legal challenge by Shaun Thompson, a Black man wrongly identified by LFR.
7. <https://www.expressandstar.com/news/science-and-technology/2025/08/19/facial-recognition-alerts-to-prevent-crime-in-uk-shops-hit-a-record-10000-every-week/> - An Express & Star report, based on PA agency copy, states Facewatch recorded 43,602 suspect alerts in July 2025, the company’s highest monthly total, equivalent to over 10,000 alerts a week and a 134.8% rise on July 2024’s 18,564. It notes Facewatch logged 407,771 alerts over the 12 months to 31 July 2025 and quotes chief executive Nick Fisher saying the surge highlights unprecedented levels of criminal activity and violence affecting retail staff. The article explains how Facewatch alerts work, and includes industry context such as rising retail abuse and privacy campaigners' concerns.