# Concerns rise over 4D number plates evading detection in the UK



Concerns regarding the use of '4D' number plates in the UK, which render vehicles invisible to Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems, have prompted the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) to consider regulatory measures. In a recent exchange in Parliament, Labour MP Sarah Coombes inquired about the discussions between the Secretary of State for Transport and the DVLA regarding these types of number plates. In response, Parliamentary Under-Secretary Lilian Greenwood outlined the ongoing efforts to combat illegal number plates and the potential penalties for those selling them.

Greenwood disclosed that there is collaboration between the DVLA, the National Police Chiefs’ Council (NPCC), various police forces, and Trading Standards to address the prevalence of illegal plates, including those with raised characters, known colloquially as '4D plates' or 'ghost plates.' The Minister noted that these plates are often made from materials that evade detection by infrared-based speed and ANPR systems. She stated, “Work is currently ongoing to quantify the number of illegal plates that may be in circulation.”

Under existing legislation, it is illegal to sell number plates that do not comply with regulations, with fines of up to £2,500 for offenders. Greenwood highlighted the responsibility of registered businesses to verify the identity and entitlement of customers seeking to obtain number plates, and those who fail to comply risk fines and removal from the Register of Number Plate Suppliers via court action.

The significant issue of rogue drivers exploiting these 'ghost plates' continues to attract attention, with recent comments from former Biometrics and Surveillance Camera Commissioner Professor Fraser Sampson indicating that approximately one in 15 drivers manage to circumvent the ANPR technology. He described this phenomenon as "staggeringly simple" and expressed disappointment over the lack of action to address the manipulation of the system in his resignation letter.

Despite a high accuracy rate of 97 percent for ANPR technology, it misreads around 2.4 million plates each day, contributing to potentially unjust penalties for innocent drivers. Daily operations of about 15,400 traffic cameras generate between 75 and 80 million number plate reads, a figure projected to increase to 100 million by the end of 2024. Sampson emphasised the necessity of bus lanes and speed cameras for public safety, asserting, “Bus lanes are essential for the public transport network to operate efficiently and speed cameras help to keep the public safe from speeding vehicles and reduce the likelihood of a crash.”

He further cautioned about the vulnerability of ANPR systems, stating that they ultimately rely on physical number plates, which can be easily compromised by unregulated markets offering stealth plates and cloned registration marks. The ease of making these systems ineffective remains a pressing concern, especially as enforcement technologies grow increasingly pivotal in policing and traffic management.

Citizens in areas under such enforcement may face significant financial penalties if caught evading the regulations, with taxi drivers in places like Wolverhampton also at risk of having their licenses suspended or revoked if found using these illegal methods. The ongoing investigation into the prevalence of these 4D number plates signals a move towards tighter control and regulation to uphold the efficacy of traffic monitoring systems.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://tribuneonlineng.com/uk-experts-warn-drivers-against-using-ghost-number-plates/> - This article supports the concern over illegal 'ghost plates' in the UK, which can evade speed and ANPR systems, and notes up to one in 15 motorists using anti-ANPR technology.
* <https://www.gbnews.com/lifestyle/cars/drivers-warned-ghost-number-plates-speed-cameras> - This article further discusses the issue of 'ghost plates,' citing Professor Fraser Sampson's concerns about the ease of defeating ANPR systems and the efforts of Wolverhampton City Council to combat the issue.
* <https://numberplateclinic.co.uk/the-science-behind-4d-plates-and-their-interaction-with-speed-cameras/> - This source clarifies that legally compliant 4D plates are not the issue but highlights that non-compliant or 'ghost plates' can evade detection, although they are not meant to do so legally.
* <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/number-plate-supplier-register> - This webpage explains the legal requirements for number plate suppliers in the UK and the penalties for non-compliance, aligning with the Minister's statement about selling illegal plates.
* <https://www.npcc.police.uk/NationalPolicingPolicies/AutomaticNumberPlateRecognitionANPR/ANPRStrategy2020-2025> - This National Police Chiefs’ Council document outlines strategies related to ANPR technology and its applications, which aligns with the collaboration mentioned between different authorities.
* <https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/news/latest-news/2024/02/new-technology-to-tackle-rogue-drivers> - This webpage details Wolverhampton City Council's efforts to tackle issues like 'ghost plates' using advanced technology, supporting the claim of local authorities taking action.