# UK motorists increasingly use illegal ghost plates to evade traffic enforcement



Motorists across the UK are increasingly employing illegal "ghost plates" to evade detection by speed cameras and bus lane enforcement technology, according to warnings from council officials and traffic experts. These so-called ghost plates are reflective number plates designed to thwart Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems by reflecting camera flashes and rendering the plates unreadable.

The phenomenon, also known as the use of 3D or 4D plates, has allowed drivers to circumvent traffic enforcement measures, including fines for speeding and charges for entering low-emission zones. Wolverhampton City Council, among others, has responded by deploying advanced camera technology that can detect these elusive plates more effectively as part of more stringent enforcement efforts initiated last year.

Statistics shared by Professor Fraser Sampson, who formerly oversaw the UK's national ANPR system, reveal the scale of the issue. Approximately one in every 15 drivers reportedly uses methods to trick the ANPR system. This widespread evasion is facilitated through various means, such as cloning number plates, applying reflective tape, or purchasing so-called stealth plates from online vendors, rendering vehicles effectively "invisible" to cameras.

In a letter addressed to Transport Secretary Mark Harper upon his departure from the role, Professor Sampson underscored the significant challenges facing ANPR technology. He highlighted that despite its advancements, the system still hinges on a standard plastic vehicle registration plate, which is vulnerable due to a largely unregulated market for plates.

"The humble number plate represents a single and readily assailable point of failure," Professor Sampson wrote. "The ANPR network is easily defeated by the manufacture and sale of stealth plates, cloned registration marks and other rudimentary obscurant tactics." He also warned that the incentives for motorists to exploit these vulnerabilities are rising, especially as traffic enforcement mechanisms such as emission zones become more widespread.

The professor also disclosed the sheer volume of ANPR data processed daily, with as many as 80 million reads from around 15,400 traffic lanes. The system’s accuracy stands at 97%, meaning an estimated 2.4 million incorrect readings occur each day, sometimes causing wrongful fines. Professor Sampson anticipates the number of reads could reach 100 million per day by the end of 2024.

Local authorities have introduced fines of £100 for motorists caught using ghost plates. In Wolverhampton, enforcement officers have been equipped with new camera technology capable of countering the reflective plates as part of an ongoing crackdown on these illegal practices.

The Wales Online report emphasises concerns over the increased dependence on ANPR systems in policing, law enforcement, and traffic management, which may be undermined by widespread use of such evasion tactics. The issue demonstrates continuing challenges in balancing technological enforcement with the evolving methods used by some drivers to avoid detection.

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

## Bibliography

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