# AI-powered cameras detect mobile phone use to curb dangerous driving across UK roads



As road safety concerns continue to escalate, a series of innovative AI-powered cameras are set to change the landscape of traffic enforcement across the UK. These advanced systems, designed to detect drivers using mobile phones, come as part of a broader initiative responding to alarming statistics indicating that nearly nine in ten motorists admit to regularly touching their phones while driving. This reckless behaviour, which is now illegal following recent legislative strictures, poses significant dangers not only to the drivers themselves but also to passengers and pedestrians.

The introduction of AI cameras, currently being trialled in various locations, marks a pivotal shift in law enforcement tactics. In Staffordshire, these cameras have already been deployed on major roads, and their permanent installation is anticipated in the near future. The overarching aim, as articulated by safety officials, is to alter driver perceptions and behaviour in a manner similar to the deterrence effect observed with traditional speed cameras.

One of the most compelling demonstrations of the capability of these AI cameras was witnessed in Greater Manchester, where over 3,200 incidents of mobile phone use and seat belt violations were recorded within a five-week trial period. This included instances involving unrestrained children, prompting Kate Green, the Deputy Mayor, to call for a heightened awareness among drivers regarding these infractions. The effectiveness of this initiative lies not only in its deterrent potential but also in its role as a valuable data-gathering exercise to better understand the prevalence of such offences.

In a similar vein, South Gloucestershire Council has reported promising results from its own deployment of AI technology. During a focused twelve-hour observation, 150 instances of seatbelt offences and seven cases of mobile phone distractions were recorded. According to Pamela Williams, the council's road safety education manager, the technology is aimed at compelling drivers to seriously reassess their behaviour, a sentiment echoed across multiple regions implementing these systems.

Further south, in Devon and Cornwall, police have initiated a pilot involving AI cameras that not only monitor mobile phone use but also capacitively detect seat belt violations. By capturing high-speed images of vehicles, the system is designed to issue warning letters or notices of intended prosecution to offenders. This approach aims to foster a culture of compliance and significantly diminish instances of unsafe driving practices.

The surge in such technology is underscored by findings from the RAC, revealing a resurgence in illegal mobile phone usage amongst young drivers—an issue that had previously seen a decline following tougher penalties introduced in 2017. Rod Dennis, spokesperson for the RAC, highlighted the necessity of stringent enforcement to catalyse a change in driving behaviours. The growing call for increased penalties, which could see fines rise beyond the current level of £200 and six penalty points, reflects a desire among advocates for stricter measures to deter this pervasive issue.

As the UK grapples with road safety challenges, particularly among younger demographics, the integration of AI in traffic law enforcement is heralding a potential sea change. The hope is that these innovative solutions will not merely capture offenders but will encourage a fundamental shift in attitudes towards safe driving practices, ultimately making roads safer for everyone.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-ai-cameras-coming-roads-31732938), [[4]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2024-08-02/ai-traffic-cameras-that-detect-mobile-phone-use-rolled-out)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce8dpvxexz8o), [[5]](https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/ai-camera-driving-motoring-offences-cornwall-police-b1101293.html)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cll46y3r4edo), [[6]](https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/news/motoring-news/more-police-forces-join-trial-of-new-ai-road-safety-cameras/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[4]](https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2024-08-02/ai-traffic-cameras-that-detect-mobile-phone-use-rolled-out), [[7]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-68402912)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-ai-cameras-coming-roads-31732938), [[6]](https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/news/motoring-news/more-police-forces-join-trial-of-new-ai-road-safety-cameras/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.birminghammail.co.uk/news/midlands-news/new-ai-cameras-coming-roads-31732938> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/ce8dpvxexz8o> - In November 2024, AI cameras in Greater Manchester detected over 3,200 drivers using mobile phones or not wearing seat belts over a five-week period. The 'Heads Up' system captured images of drivers holding phones or not wearing seat belts, sometimes with passengers, including children, unrestrained. Kate Green, Greater Manchester's deputy mayor, expressed hope that these images would serve as a 'wake-up call' to many drivers. The trial aimed to understand the prevalence of such offences in the region and to encourage safer driving behaviours.
3. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cll46y3r4edo> - In April 2024, South Gloucestershire Council installed AI cameras in vans to monitor drivers using mobile phones or not wearing seat belts. During a 12-hour survey, 150 motorists were recorded not wearing seat belts, and seven were distracted by their mobile phones. The council's road safety education manager, Pamela Williams, stated that using such technology would make drivers seriously consider their behaviour. The initiative aimed to reduce serious and fatal road injuries in the area.
4. <https://www.itv.com/news/westcountry/2024-08-02/ai-traffic-cameras-that-detect-mobile-phone-use-rolled-out> - In August 2024, Devon and Cornwall Police began rolling out AI cameras capable of detecting seatbelt and mobile phone offences across the region. The cameras take high-speed front-facing and overhead images of vehicles, using AI to identify potential offences. If an offence is detected, the driver receives a warning letter or a notice of intended prosecution. The initiative aimed to improve driver behaviour and enhance road safety in Devon and Cornwall.
5. <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/tech/ai-camera-driving-motoring-offences-cornwall-police-b1101293.html> - In August 2023, an AI camera system in Cornwall detected nearly 300 motoring offences in just 72 hours. The system identified 117 instances of drivers using mobile phones and 180 seatbelt violations on the A30 near Launceston. The technology captures high-quality photos of drivers, which are then reviewed by AI software to determine if an offence has occurred. The trial aimed to address the high number of road deaths and serious injuries in the area.
6. <https://www.rac.co.uk/drive/news/motoring-news/more-police-forces-join-trial-of-new-ai-road-safety-cameras/> - In March 2024, National Highways expanded a trial of AI-powered cameras that detect seatbelt and mobile phone offences to include ten additional police forces across the UK. The cameras, mounted on vehicles or trailers, capture footage of drivers and passengers, which is processed by AI to detect various offences. The initiative aimed to increase enforcement of traffic laws and improve road safety by deterring dangerous driving behaviours.
7. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-sussex-68402912> - In February 2024, Sussex Police began trialling new AI safety cameras to detect drivers using mobile phones or not wearing seat belts. The cameras, mounted on vehicles or trailers, automatically detect offences, and footage is processed by AI before being sent to police for further action. The trial aimed to influence driver behaviour and enhance road safety in the region.