

# LPR cameras: Coming soon to a Clark Bridge near you

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ALTON - License-plate-reader (LPR) cameras will be installed on the Clark Bridge either later this week or just after Christmas, Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons said Monday morning.

Simmons said the installation process would as long as two days, and Alton Police officers would be increasing traffic enforcement in the area during the installation of the cameras. Cited as "Orwellian" by opponents and "necessary for safety of the community" by proponents, the cameras will scan the license plate of every vehicle crossing the bridge and send alerts to local law enforcement if the vehicle has been reported stolen or the owner has a warrant. The cameras also take still images of vehicles, which may be useful for locating stolen vehicles, missing persons or even suspected drug traffickers, Simmons said in previous interviews with Riverbender.com.

If the cameras are not installed later this week, Simmons said they will be installed in the days following Christmas, most likely by Dec. 27. In a poll hosted on Riverbender.com, as many as 59.88 percent of poll-takers were in favor of the installation of these cameras. A vocal minority, however, cites potential abuses of such a system.

To the detractors, Simmons said the system would help keep the communities of Alton, Godfrey, Wood River, Jerseyville and the surrounding areas safe by alerting them criminal elements are coming from St. Louis and North St. Louis County. Simmons said he believes many of Alton's issues, such as drug abuse and violence, are caused by people entering the community via the Clark Bridge. He said this monitoring system will assist in the safety of the community.

The cost of the cameras is being split three ways between the City of Alton, Village of Godfrey and Madison County State's Attorney's Office.

Access to the system will be granted via password, and several law enforcement agencies in the area will have that access. Data will be stored in a secure location in St. Louis for a set amount of time, but that time frame has not been revealed by the Alton Police Department as of yet.

Many opponents of the cameras are also concerned about the cameras potentially being used for traffic enforcement, but Simmons said they will not, and cannot be converted to serve such a purpose.

Others say the cameras will cause criminals to divert their path from the Clark Bridge to Route 3, but Simmons said that route will take them through several more municipalities, which increases the risk of being caught. He said he was confident suspects would still utilize the Clark Bridge in spite of the camera system.