

Bridge cameras and bank robberies

by Cory Davenport, Contributing Writer
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ALTON - How can the upcoming license-plate-reader (LPR) cameras assist with crimes such as the current case of a serial bank robber striking the Riverbend?

Alton Police Chief Jason "Jake" Simmons said the cameras, which are being installed Thursday and Friday, and will be in full use by next Tuesday or Wednesday, will be super effective against crimes such as grand theft auto and bank robberies once they are fully-functioning. He said the cameras, which read the license plates of *every single* vehicle passing over the Clark Bridge and store the data at an undisclosed electronic storage location somewhere in St. Louis for a limited, but also undisclosed amount of time, will be able to alert authorities when a stolen car passes by them, and will also send out an alert to local law enforcement agencies when someone with a warrant is passing through.

But, again, how can that help stop this bank robber, who Simmons confirmed is believed by the Alton and East Alton Police Departments as well as the Madison County Sheriff's Office to be the same suspect in the robberies of Alton's U.S. Bank, Godfrey's Reliance Bank and East Alton's Regions Bank?

"With an armed robbery, we can usually get a vehicle description and sometimes even a partial plate," Simmons said. "The LPR can look for that specific plate. It can also track stolen cars, and notify St. Louis and St. Charles authorities when a car is crossing the bridge. If a unit is in the area, they can stop the car."

Police investigating this string of robberies have told Riverbender.com a partial plate was recalled by a witness of the Regions Bank robbery in East Alton. The suspect, described as a black male with medium build donning a black hoodie and dark glasses, has been seen in a black Chrysler 300 with tinted windows, chrome wheels and Missouri plates in at least two of the robberies.

If that partial plate and vehicle description was loaded into the LPR's database, it would flag any incoming or outgoing vehicles with that partial plate fitting that vehicle's description. With that information, Simmons said officers could get a still-frame image of the vehicle and, assuming it was not stolen, even the identity of the robber.

When the system is in full operation next week, Simmons said he would invite members of the media to see it in action. More details on how it works will be available at that time.