

Operation virage plus - targeting foreign vehicles that commit speeding offences

Operation virage plus aims to identify speeding foreign vehicles and their drivers. These vehicles are not registered with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Roads policing
Organisation	Lancashire Constabulary
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Region	North West
Partners	Police
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.
Start date	September 2024
Scale of initiative	Local

Key details

Target group	Adults Communities General public
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Aim

To reduce speeding by foreign vehicles in Lancashire by identifying target vehicles, intercepting them and issuing the drivers/owners with the relevant paperwork for committing a speeding offence.

Intended outcome

- a reduction in the number of foreign vehicles speeding in Lancashire
- an increase in target vehicles being identified and intercepted
- an increase in drivers that are caught speeding being issued with the relevant paperwork for the offence

Description

There was approximately 139 foreign vehicles activating speed cameras per month in Lancashire prior to operation virage plus. Each speed camera activation is processed by Safer Roads Unit (SRU) camera technicians. For any foreign vehicle, the speeding incident was marked as 'No Further Action (NFA) - Foreign Vehicle' and before operation virage plus, no action would be taken.

All UK vehicles must be registered with DVLA, any foreign vehicles entering the UK are allowed six months before they are required to be registered.

The SRU analyst runs a report from Lancashire Police's camera adjudication system as part of operation virage plus. The report lists all offences tagged with the NFA - Foreign Vehicles tag to identify recent repeat speeders that might still be in the Lancashire area. Vehicle registration marks (VRMs) are then shared with the road crime team and include speeding times and locations. The road crime team then put automatic number-plate recognition (ANPR) markers on the vehicle. If the vehicle goes past an ANPR site, nearby police resources will be alerted to intercept and obtain the

driver's details. If no other offences are found, the driver is free to go but their vehicle may be seized if other offences are discovered. This could include having no insurance or no driving license.

Once officers have the driver details, the SRU can send them a Notice of Intended Prosecution (NIP) in relation to the speeding offence. They may be offered a retraining course, conditional offer of fixed penalty or be sent to court depending on their eligibility. If they fail to respond, the driver will be taken to court. If the vehicle is detected again, further paperwork will be issued to the driver. If offences continue, the driver may be disqualified.

Evaluation

Lancashire Constabulary are measuring the overall number of foreign vehicles activating speed cameras around the county. Drivers rarely commit offences once they have been intercepted. Reasons for this may be that the vehicle has since left the country, but the overall the number of offences is reducing.

Overall impact

Since operation virage plus has been running, there has been a reduction of 40% in the number of foreign vehicles speeding. 15% of foreign vehicles that had been intercepted by police have also been seized due to no insurance, no license, or other vehicle defects.

Since September 2022, operation virage plus has seen a considerable reduction in the number of foreign vehicles speeding in Lancashire. In 2022, there was an average of 139 foreign vehicles per month activating speed cameras. The figures have now reduced to an average of 83 per month, a decrease of 40%.

March 2023 was a pivotal month for operation virage plus with 21 intercepted vehicles. This was not part of a coordinated operation. March 2023 saw the largest decrease in foreign vehicles speeding in Lancashire, from 130 vehicles detected in February 2023 to 65 in March 2023, a 50% reduction. Since March 2023, there has been a considerable reduction in foreign vehicles speeding.

Data monitoring also indicates that once a foreign vehicle has been stopped by the police, they commit fewer speeding offences in the future. This indicates that Operation Virage also prevents future offending.

To date, a total of 179 NIPs have been issued, 70 offences have gone to court with 50 Drivers becoming disqualified from driving in the UK. The typical fine at Court for each offence is £264 (Victim Surcharge), £660 (Fine) and £90 (Costs).

Learning

Strong communication

Initially the flow of information from the SRU analyst to the road and crime unit (RCU) sergeants was not direct. It went to the SRU sergeant, then to a tactical operations distribution list and eventually arrived with the RCU sergeant. Communication improved greatly once the analyst contacted the RCU sergeant directly.

Foreign delivery vehicles

While the number of UK-based foreign vehicles has reduced during this initiative, there is currently very little that can be done for vehicles with foreign addresses. Currently there are quite a few European delivery vehicles that cannot be issued NIPs. There would have to be a change in the law to share driver details and to issue fixed penalties, but this goes beyond the means of the operation.

Multi-language paperwork

NIP paperwork needs to be made available in different languages to explain the speeding offence and highlight the severity of not responding to the paperwork. It is possible that many of the drivers taken to court did not understand the importance of the paperwork.

Ghost licenses

Court sessions are held without the defendant being present so the driver might get points, a considerable fine and sometimes disqualified from driving in their absence. Disqualifications are added to a ghost UK Licence which is not linked to the drivers domestic driving license. Court results are now being checked to ensure disqualified periods are updated on the Police National Computer (PNC), so if the driver is stopped again, the officer is immediately alerted that the driver is disqualified. Within days of introducing this in July 2024, the force had stopped a driver in a different vehicle who was disqualified.

Further work is being done to try and contact DVLA and Border Control to discuss how they record foreign vehicles entering the UK. Understanding how organisations are recording this data and exploring data sharing with the police would be beneficial. Lancashire Constabulary are keen to understand what other police forces are doing regarding this problem.

Operation Virage Plus is run by a small number of staff and is not resource intensive. The operation has always received senior leadership support throughout. Operation virage plus has been celebrated in Lancashire Constabulary and has won a problem-solving award in the force and has also been presented to the National Police Chief's Council (NPCC).

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