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UK Expands Facial-Recognition Across Public Spaces

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Millions of people across the UK are now being scanned by real-time facial-recognition systems in public spaces, making the country a leader in Europe for using the technology at scale to support law enforcement and community security.

At London's Notting Hill Carnival, which is expected to attract around two million attendees celebrating Afro-Caribbean culture over Sunday and Monday, facial-recognition cameras have been positioned near entrances and exits. The Metropolitan Police use the system to identify individuals with outstanding warrants or criminal records by comparing faces in

crowds with those in police databases. This targeted approach strengthens public safety and assists officers in preventing and responding to criminal activity efficiently.

Metropolitan Police Chief Mark Rowley described the technology as "an effective policing tool," noting that it has helped locate offenders at crime hotspots, resulting in more than 1,000 arrests since the start of 2024. The system was first trialled in 2016, and its deployment has expanded in recent years to improve community protection and ensure accountability for those who commit crimes.

Private businesses have also adopted facial recognition to enhance security and protect property. Supermarkets and retail stores rely on services like Facewatch to detect known shoplifters, alert staff when they enter stores, and reduce theft without increasing staff costs. This demonstrates how private-sector innovation contributes to public order while limiting the need for additional government intervention.

The technology works by triggering an alert when someone on a watchlist passes near cameras, enabling officers to confirm the individual's identity and take appropriate action. Many cameras are deployed in mobile police vans, allowing for rapid response to emerging threats and flexible security coverage.

Authorities continue to ensure that facial recognition is deployed responsibly. Police follow clear operational procedures to balance public safety with individual privacy. Oversight and adherence to established rules maintain trust between law enforcement and the community while allowing officers to perform their core duties effectively.

As the UK continues to expand the use of facial-recognition technology, the focus remains on protecting citizens, supporting voluntary compliance with the law, and empowering both public and private institutions to safeguard property and lives. The combination of targeted policing and private-sector solutions demonstrates a practical approach to security without excessive government overreach.