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Metropolitan Police to Expand Live Facial Recognition as Part of Operational Overhaul

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The Metropolitan Police is set to significantly increase its use of live facial recognition (LFR) technology, raising weekly deployments from four to ten across five days. The

decision comes amid a major internal restructuring following the loss of 1,400 officers and 300 staff due to financial pressures.

LFR allows police to scan faces captured on surveillance cameras and match them against a real-time watchlist of wanted individuals. The technology will be deployed more frequently across London, including at high-profile events such as the Notting Hill Carnival during the August bank holiday. Previous trials of LFR at the carnival were conducted in 2016 and 2017.

As of July, the Met reported that over 1,000 arrests had been made through the use of LFR, with 773 resulting in either a charge or caution. Police Commissioner Sir Mark Rowley emphasized that the technology is used with care, targeting individuals involved in serious crimes, including registered sex offenders and violent criminals. “It’s a fantastic piece of technology. It’s very responsibly used, and that’s why most of the public support it,” Rowley said.

The force is also bolstering its public order crime team, increasing the number of officers from 48 to 63. The move responds to a rise in protest-related crime, particularly linked to international and environmental demonstrations seen over the past two years.

Despite support from law enforcement leaders, LFR’s expansion has drawn criticism from civil liberties organizations. Charlie Whelton, policy and campaigns officer at Liberty, said: “It’s incredibly concerning to see an expansion of facial recognition, especially at a time when there is a complete lack of regulation governing its use.” He called for immediate legislation to ensure independent oversight and protect civil rights.

Data from a joint investigation by *The Guardian* and *Liberty Investigates* revealed that police forces scanned nearly 4.7 million faces with LFR in 2024, more than double the 2023 total. Deployment of LFR vans increased from 63 in 2023 to 256 last year.

Additionally, retrospective facial recognition searches using the Police National Database (PND) rose sharply, from 138,720 in 2023 to 252,798 in 2024.

The Home Office is working with police on a new national platform, the Strategic Facial Matcher, which will allow searches across multiple databases, including custody photos and immigration records. While supporters view LFR as a valuable crime-fighting tool, questions remain over legal safeguards and the protection of individual privacy.