

Department of Homeland Security invests \$6.9 million to spy on Boston commuters

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The Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) has begun installing hundreds of high-definition cameras on buses throughout the transit system as part of a plan to implement video surveillance across the entire bus and subway fleet. The video installation is to be paid for with a \$6.9 million grant from the Department of Homeland Security.

The cameras are equipped with Verizon's 4G LTE network to allow the digital video feed inside the bus to be streamed in real time to the MBTA control center, where staff will be able to monitor passengers in real time. The video feed, which provides a 360-degree view of the inside of buses, will also be available to MBTA Transit Police from inside their cruisers.

The MBTA has said it plans to install the new system on 225 buses by the end of the summer, and an additional 210 buses will have existing systems, with cameras currently trained on the fare box, transferred to the new system. These upgrades will also allow live streaming. The 435 cameras will allow monitoring of two thirds of all bus trips. Officials hope to receive funding to place cameras on all the system's buses and on any new train cars. Randy Clarke, senior director of security and emergency management for the MBTA, told the *Boston Globe* it is the most extensive surveillance program on a major transit system in the country, with three cameras installed on each bus.

A report published on rt.com in December 2012 noted: "Cities across America are equipping their public transport systems with audio recording devices, potentially storing every word spoken by passengers onboard." The web site reports that multimillion-dollar upgrades are underway in several US cities, including San Francisco; Eugene, Oregon; Traverse City, Michigan; Columbus, Ohio; Baltimore, Maryland; Hartford, Connecticut; and Athens, Georgia. Much of

the funding for these upgrades comes from the Department of Homeland Security.

Boston transit officials claim the mass surveillance is intended as a deterrent to crime, citing 28 attacks on drivers so far this year. However, Transit Police superintendent Joseph O'Connor acknowledged to the *Globe* that "crime is relatively low on buses."

The new surveillance program has nothing to do with fighting crime, but is part of efforts of the US state to gather an unprecedented amount of information about the US population, as revealed in the documents released by NSA whistleblower Edward Snowden.

In addition to the massive data gathering and processing at NSA centers, local law enforcement agencies are engaged in routine political spying. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attack on the World Trade Center, a national network of so-called fusion centers was established. Today, there are a reported 78 of these centers located in states and major urban areas across the country.

According to the Homeland Security web site, "State and major urban area fusion centers serve as focal points within the state and local environment for the receipt, analysis, gathering, and sharing of threat-related information between the federal government and state, local, tribal, territorial (SLTT) and private sector partners."

The site claims the fusion centers "provide interdisciplinary expertise and situational awareness to inform decision-making at all levels of government. They conduct analysis and facilitate information sharing while assisting law enforcement and homeland security partnership preventing, protecting against, and responding to crime and terrorism."

There are two such centers in Massachusetts, the Commonwealth Fusion Center in Maynard and the

Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC) in Boston. These centers played a major role in the police-military lockdown of the Boston area in the aftermath of the Marathon bombings of April 15 last year.

An October 2012 report by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Massachusetts and the local chapter of the National Lawyers Guild (NLG) gave a rare view into the real purpose of these centers and the surveillance they conduct. The report, titled “Policing Dissent: Police Surveillance Activity in Boston,” summarizes documents obtained by the ACLU and NLG after suing for access on behalf of six groups and four activists. The report states that the documents “show that officers assigned to the BRIC are collecting and keeping information about constitutionally protected speech and political activity. The documents provide the public with its first glimpse into the political surveillance practices of the Boston Police Department.”

The documents cited in the report present the widescale political spying conducted against antiwar protesters, civil rights campaigners and other political activists, none of it related to criminal activity. The files obtained as result of the lawsuit include so-called intelligence reports written by officers and illegally shared across security agencies and kept on file.

The Code of Federal Regulations provides that federally funded surveillance projects may collect and maintain information on individuals “only if there is reasonable suspicion that the individual is involved in criminal conduct or activity and the information is relevant to that criminal conduct or activity.” The regulations also stipulate that surveillance teams “shall not collect or maintain criminal intelligence information about the political, religious or social views, associations, or activities of any individual or any group...unless such information directly relates to criminal conduct.”

The BRIC’s own guidelines state: “The BRIC will not seek or retain and originating agencies will agree to not submit information about individuals or organizations solely on the basis of their religious, political, or social views or activities; their participation in a particular noncriminal organization or lawful event; or their races, ethnicities, citizenship, places of origin, ages, disabilities, genders, or sexual orientation.”

The report makes clear, however, that this is precisely the information that officers have been gathering in Boston for years. One intelligence report cited talks of a March 23, 2007, meeting at the Central Congregational Church in Jamaica Plain, noting that the meeting “was arranged by Boston City Councilor Felix Arroyo” and that a “BU professor emeritus/activist” (the late Howard Zinn) and Cindy Sheehan, a member of Gold Star Families for Peace whose son was killed in Iraq, “will be speaking at the March 24 demonstration.”

Another report refers to an FBI source who provided information to the Boston police on protesters’ plans to “pass out fliers promoting their cause.” A phone call between officers from the BRIC and Metro DC Intelligence Section with officials discussing how many activists from the Northeast attended a Washington, D.C., peace rally is also documented.

The authors of the report write that “Videos taped at public demonstrations and ‘intelligence reports’ written by officers assigned to the BRIC show pervasive monitoring of peaceful demonstrations. Nine out of the 13 reports obtained by the ACLU and NLG discuss only political activity, never mentioning criminal or even potentially criminal acts; two reference nonviolent civil disobedience. Nonetheless, all of the reports include the category ‘Criminal Act’ and use labels such as ‘Extremist,’ ‘Civil Disturbance’ or ‘homSec-Domestic.’ ”

The Homeland Security-funded mass surveillance programs in Boston and other cities across the country have as little to do with fighting crime as the NSA data collection has to do with fighting terrorism. They are directed not at criminal elements and terrorists but at social and political dissent. The preparation of police state measures in anticipation of a mass movement against social inequality and war is well advanced.



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