

INTELLIGENT NUMBER PLATE PROJECT

With the imminent launch of Gauteng's intelligent number plate project (iNP), the foremost question on the minds of vehicle owners has to be: is another expensive system really necessary? In truth, once the benefits of the iNP have been analysed, the answer is yes. If that's the case, what are the benefits and what is iNP anyway?

iNP is the creation of high integrity vehicle identification involving the introduction of a resilient aluminium vehicle number plate, supported by a process to securely distribute and issue these plates. This, in turn, is supported by processes and methods for effective law enforcement and transparent auditing of the entire system. The new number plates will introduce, for the first time, an RFID-enabled tag which is central to the new system and process flow.

RFID, or radio frequency identification, is an intelligent tag which contains a chip holding vital information, usually in the form of a unique identifying number or code, protected by an encryption application for integrity. This is not the tag of science fiction movies, which contains personal information and owner's DNA profile, but rather an ingenious use of technology that many aren't aware is already deeply entrenched in our lives, posing no risk to individuals.

The increasing use of cameras to detect criminal activity involving vehicles uses only the number plate to provide identification for apprehension and prosecution of offenders. The ease with which number plates can currently be obtained facilitates the use of false plates and licence discs to export stolen vehicles or to disguise vehicles used in crimes. Furthermore, duplicated plates can be used to operate a number of vehicles on one licence or deliberate faults on number plates e.g. reversal of order of characters can be used to disguise a vehicle's true identity.

The key component of the new system is the RFID-enabled tag, but this will be supported with other physical changes to the current plate system which will contribute the whole success of the programme. The tag itself contains a unique identifying number, referred to as the unique identity number. The number plate will now also include manufacturer's details, a unique serial number, an embossed 2D barcode matching the tag's unique number, expiry date and validation label. The aluminium material on its own has the benefit of virtual indestructibility in the case of fire or explosion. It has been tested in a variety of controlled experiments that would make even seasoned pyromaniacs breathless.

Number plate issuers will no longer be able to operate with invisibility and impunity, and will be held liable for transgressions whether intended or not. Law enforcement officers will now have a tool for immediate identification of transgressions, but will also be regulated in terms of measurement of performance. Mischievous citizens too, will now be monitored more stringently and in the case of certain drivers, may find themselves undergoing necessary driver education that they might have missed the first time. On the subject of mischievous citizens, the effectiveness of the new number plates are unaffected by mud splatters, carefully applied foil or spray paint but at the same time contain no personal details that can contravene privacy laws and put the citizen at risk.

Considering all of this, it will be advisable for citizens to pay close attention to the roll-out of the new system and keep abreast of the flow of the information that will separately highlight the different facets of the system.

(extract from article in PositionIT e-News 22/06/2010 Contact: Carol Willis, Smart X, Tel 011 462-1690, carol@smartx.co.za).