

Report to / Rapport au:

**OTTAWA POLICE SERVICE BOARD
LA COMMISSION DE SERVICE DE POLICE D'OTTAWA**

24 February 2025 / 24 février 2025

Submitted by / Soumis par:

**Chief of Police, Ottawa Police Service / Chef de police, Service de police
d'Ottawa**

Contact Person / Personne ressource:

**Deputy Chief Paul Burnett, Community Police Command / Commandement de la
police communautaire
BurnettP@ottawapolice.ca**

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO INQUIRY I-25-03 – OBSTRUCTED LICENSE PLATE

**OBJET: RÉPONSE À L'ENQUÊTE I-25-03 – PLAQUE D'IMMATRICULATION
OBSTRUÉE**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Ottawa Police Service Board receive this report for information.

RECOMMENDATIONS DU RAPPORT

**Que la Commission de service de police d'Ottawa prenne connaissance du
présent rapport à titre d'information.**

INQUIRY

Recently, City of Ottawa staff recently conducted a review of data from January to October 2024 from the Automated Speed Enforcement Cameras. Funds from Automated Speed Enforcement Cameras, which average about \$20 million a year for the City, including \$1m that was provided to the OPS as of Budget 2025. The data in the City of Ottawa study showed that roughly 17% of incidents are rejected due to unreadable plates. While in some cases this can be related to weather, 12% of total incidents were determined to be related to Damaged, Obstructed or Missing Plates, specifically 50,796 incidents out of 431,461 from January to October 2024. As per section 13 of the Highway Traffic Act, drivers are required to ensure that license plates

are unobscured and readily visible to police officers, police technology, red light cameras, speed cameras and toll highway cameras.

How many tickets were issued by OPS for a violation of this particular section of the HTA related to obstructed license plates were issued in this same time period? (January to October 2024)

RESPONSE

The Ottawa Police Service (OPS) recognizes the significant impact that unreadable license plates have on the effectiveness of Automated Speed Enforcement (ASE) cameras, red light cameras, and other traffic enforcement measures. Ensuring that license plates are clearly visible is essential for maintaining accountability on the roads and supporting broader traffic safety initiatives. It should be noted that the traffic safety priorities for enforcement are stunt driving, impaired driving, speeding, and distracted driving.

Under Section 13 of the Highway Traffic Act (HTA), drivers are required to ensure their license plates are unobstructed, properly mounted, and clearly visible to police officers and enforcement technology. However, a recent review by City of Ottawa staff indicates that **12% of ASE incidents (50,796 out of 431,461 recorded incidents between January and October 2024)** were rejected due to damaged, obstructed, or missing plates.

OPS remains engaged in addressing this issue through targeted enforcement and public education efforts. From January to October 2024, OPS officers issued 1070 provincial offence notices for violations related to obstructed, dirty, or obscured license plates. A detailed breakdown of these enforcement efforts is provided in the table below.

HTA Statute	Offence Notice	Warning	Part III Summons	Grand Total
OBSTRUCT PLATE	166	453	26	645
ENTIRE PLATE NOT PLAINLY VISIBLE	69	300	10	379
DIRTY PLATE	3	43		46
Grand Total	238	796	36	1070

Enforcement Efforts and Challenges

OPS officers regularly conduct enforcement related to improper or obstructed license plates as part of broader road safety initiatives. These efforts include:

- **Targeted Traffic Stops:** Officers actively look for vehicles with illegible or improperly displayed plates during routine patrols and traffic enforcement operations.
- **Public Awareness Efforts:** Officers educate drivers about their legal responsibility to maintain clearly visible plates, emphasizing the impact on ASE effectiveness and overall road safety.

Despite these efforts, OPS faces challenges in enforcement, including:

- **Intentional Plate Obstruction:** Some drivers deliberately obscure or alter their plates to evade ASE or red-light cameras, making enforcement more complex.
- **Weather-Related Visibility Issues:** Snow, dirt, and damage from road debris can render plates unreadable, though drivers remain responsible for maintaining plate visibility.
- **Resource Allocation:** While enforcing plate visibility is important, officers must balance this with other pressing traffic enforcement priorities, including impaired, speeding and aggressive driving enforcement.

CONCLUSION

OPS is committed to ensuring compliance with Section 13 of the HTA through enforcement and awareness efforts. While significant progress has been made, the high number of unreadable plates remains a concern, particularly in relation to the effectiveness of ASE cameras and broader road safety objectives. OPS will continue to support the City of Ottawa's initiatives by enforcing license plate regulations and exploring opportunities for enhanced collaboration in addressing this issue.