



Technology helps CIDs address crime, increase sense of safety

Feb 24, 2023, 7:20am EST



Courtesy of Flock Safety

A dozen Atlanta area community improvement districts are investing in Atlanta-based Flock Safety's Automated License Plate Reader cameras to fight and deter crime.

Across metro Atlanta, community improvement districts are investing in advanced camera and video technology to fight crime and reassure businesses and visitors their areas are safe.

For many CIDs, security is a top priority.

The Gwinnett Place CID has been fighting the economic fallout of a [dying enclosed shopping complex, Gwinnett Place Mall](#), on the Pleasant Hill Road corridor in Duluth. The mall has lost most of its stores and become a focus for crime and homelessness.

To overcome a growing perception the area was unsafe, the CID developed a multifaceted program to fight crime and increase feelings of safety. It initiated community patrols to sweep the area and make regular contact with business owners, and deployed license plate reader cameras throughout the district.

Gwinnett Place is one of a dozen Atlanta-area CIDs positioning Automated License Plate Reader (ALPR) cameras, [made by Atlanta-based company Flock Safety](#), on roadways, where they take photos of license plates on passing vehicles. The images can be searched by vehicle make, color, type, license plate number and other identifiers.

CIDs in Cobb, DeKalb, Fulton and Gwinnett counties and in the area of Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport are using the devices, according to the company.

In 2018, Flock Safety began installing these cameras in private neighborhoods and businesses around metro Atlanta. In Gwinnett County, early adopters included the Gateway 85 and Evermore CIDs in late 2018, followed by Sugarloaf CID, which installed its cameras in 2019, according to Gwinnett County Police.

“The CIDs asked for permission to be granted to officers working in the area of the CIDs to have access to search from their cameras,” said Officer [Hideshi Valle](#), spokesperson for the Gwinnett Police Department. In addition, the county created new policies and agreements on how data from the cameras would be used and collected, according to Valle.

The police department soon began utilizing the cameras for investigative leads as part of an initiative led by Community Relations Officer for Central Precinct Cpl. Mark Still.

When the Sugarloaf CID cameras were installed and online in April 2019, Still was able to search for a suspect vehicle involved in crimes.

The success of the program inspired Gwinnett Place CID to purchase 63 Flock cameras. It spends about \$132,000 a year on deploying and maintaining the cameras, said [Joe Allen](#), executive director, Gwinnett Place CID.

Gwinnett Police consulted with the CID on the number of cameras needed to cover the district based on an analysis of crime data for the area, Allen said. The police department also told the CID the most appropriate strategic location to put the cameras. “We worked with them on everything,” he said.

Police departments have direct access to the cameras’ databases.

“We’re able to allow (CIDs) to share camera access directly with their local law enforcement agency, like say Gwinnett County Police or Cobb County Police — all of whom we already work with,” said [Holly Beilin](#), head of public relations for Flock Safety. “They’re able to pretty seamlessly plug into that system and allow police to do their job.”

Giving authorities the ability find and identify vehicles is essential to solving crimes. According to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, almost 70% of crimes are committed with the aid of a vehicle, said Beilin. “When police need a lead to solve a case, a license plate is one of the most useful leads they can have.”

The Flock database is also connected to state and national crime databases, such as those for Amber Alert, missing and exploited children and others, she said.

The program has produced results. Gwinnett Police Central Precinct officers used ALPR data in some way in recovering 61 stolen vehicles and arresting 135 suspects in 2022, according to Valle.

In the area of Fulton and Clayton counties covered by the ATL Airport CIDs, an umbrella organization incorporating the Airport West and Airport South districts, police used ALPR data to recover 75 stolen vehicles and make 53 arrests. Technology brought together the districts’ six cities in Clayton County and five in Fulton.

“One of the biggest challenges of the airport area, especially when it comes to public safety, are the multiple jurisdictions,” said [Gerald McDowell](#), executive director of the ATL Airport CIDs, which includes more than 325 property owners over 15 square miles. “Throughout the past six or eight years, as we’ve worked with local law enforcement officers, we’ve been trying to find a solution that can overcome those jurisdictional boundaries.”

ATL Airport CIDs have deployed 75 ALPRs — 58 in the Airport West and 17 in the Airport South districts — at an annual investment of \$186,000, beginning in 2020, according to McDowell and the “All about the AACIDs” report. The cameras are part of a wider, shared surveillance network that allows jurisdictional access to 550 additional LPRs owned by other agencies and entities.

Along with ALPRs, several CIDs have also deployed technology from Peachtree Corners-based Fusus that combines video streams from cameras at private businesses and public organizations into a single platform incorporating artificial intelligence. ATL

Airport CIDs began investing in Fusus technology in 2022 at an annual cost of \$30,000, McDowell said.

“We can give access to our law enforcement partners, and now they're able to monitor public safety matters not only within their own jurisdiction, but in the neighboring jurisdictions as well,” McDowell said.

The system eliminates the silos that prevents crime information getting to the right agency.

“The real challenge to address for public safety was relying upon disparate systems that didn't work together,” Fusus CEO [Chris Lindenau](#) said.

ATL Airport CIDs have also paid for 4,254 hours of security patrolling by off-duty law enforcement officers. Its investments in the Flock Safety and Fusus technology and the security patrols totaled about \$600,000, McDowell said in a May 2022 interview. Those investments represent about 8% of the CIDs' budget, he said in January.

In addition to Flock Safety working with CIDs, Explore Gwinnett, the county convention and visitors agency, launched an initiative to put Flock cameras in about 20 hotels throughout the county, according to Allen.

Randy Southerland

Contributing Writer - *Atlanta Business Chronicle*