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Auckland Transport must take care in CCTV spend up

Radio NZ reported yesterday that “Auckland Transport’s \$4.5m plan could mean 8000 cameras watching the city”.

The Privacy Foundation New Zealand welcomes plans to ensure public safety at railway stations, and sees video cameras playing a useful part, but urges care in the spread of surveillance devices around our streets and neighbourhoods.

Associate Professor Gehan Gunasekara, Deputy Chair, said “CCTV in public spaces no longer means a few static video cameras pointed at the doorways to banks, indeed the AT proposal is described as ‘a CCTV shared service for the Auckland Region’”.

“The risks and opportunities go well beyond a few cameras into entire systems of public monitoring and information management. Such systems can raise big issues for privacy and opportunities for meaningful choices by the community. The Foundation would expect the Council to be asking for a privacy impact assessment on favoured options and also expect any such assessment to be published as part of an information package about the proposals.”

“Consideration should also be given to state of the art privacy safeguards that may be available in modern video systems such as masking of faces and encryption access controls.”

“Expensive overseas systems imported into New Zealand may have features that are novel here and may go further in the direction of social control that we may be comfortable with. Interconnection of systems, tracking, archiving and analysis of video footage, face and other biometric recognition, number plate tracking all exist in some overseas systems. Aucklanders are not necessarily opposed to such things but they would expect to have a say in deployment of surveillance technologies that go further than current norms.”

“We also note that these kind of systems are often rolled out first in the central city. Downtown Auckland has changed in character and now houses tens of thousands of residents. These city streets are people’s neighbourhoods and the privacy expectations of residents need to be taken into account.”

Contact for media enquiries: Gehan Gunasekara phone 09 923 5218, (021 0743419 mob.); or email Marie Shroff - marie.shroff@gmail.com