

June 4, 2025

MEMORANDUM

To: Public Safety Committee
From: Tamaso Johnson, Analyst
Subject: Council Bill 120994 – SPD Tracking Devices Material Update SIR ORD

On June 10th the Public Safety Committee (Committee) will have a discussion and possible vote on Council Bill (CB) 120994, authorizing approval of and accepting the Seattle Police Department's (SPD's) 2025 updated surveillance impact report (SIR) and executive overview for use of tracking devices. The Committee received an initial briefing from SPD on this technology prior to transmission of this legislation on May 13, 2025. The bill is intended to meet the requirements of Seattle Municipal Code Chapter 14.18, Acquisition and Use of Surveillance Technologies, which requires City of Seattle departments intending to acquire surveillance technology to obtain advance Council approval of that acquisition.

This memorandum (1) provides background on this technology and prior Council authorization, (2) describes the effect of CB 120994, and (3) discusses next steps.

Background

Vehicular tracking devices utilize geolocation technology (e.g. Global Positioning System or "GPS") to collect and transmit precise location information about a subject vehicle. These devices generally fall into two categories: covert and non-covert. Covert trackers can be attached to a target vehicle out of view of the occupant(s) and provide information on the movements of the vehicle without the occupant(s) knowledge. Covert trackers may be utilized by law enforcement during the course of criminal investigations. SPD policy requires either a warrant or consent prior to the use of covert tracking devices. Pursuit mitigation trackers are non-covert technology typically deployed by law enforcement in the form of a projectile fired from an on-vehicle or handheld launcher that contains a GPS transmitter and is designed to attach to a target vehicle on contact. Pursuit mitigation devices are intended to allow law enforcement to obtain continuous short-term location information about vehicles that are suspected to be involved in a crime, obviating the need for direct vehicle pursuits that may endanger suspects, officers, and bystanders. Pursuit mitigation tracking devices are currently in use by a number of law enforcement agencies around the country, including six Washington State agencies.¹

SPD's use of tracking devices, not including pursuit mitigation technology, was previously authorized by Council passage of [Ordinance 126776](#) on February 28, 2023.

¹ See SPD 5/13/2025 presentation: <https://seattle.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=14171322&GUID=17C2C098-85C1-4C2D-B81C-E5C016687984>

CB 120994

Authorizing Pursuit Mitigation Technology

SPD is currently authorized to use covert tracking devices, pursuant to Ordinance 126776. Acquisition of pursuit mitigation tracking technology would constitute a “change in the purpose or manner” of tracking device technology deployment by SPD, and therefore requires additional Council authorization of a material update to the SIR under the Surveillance Ordinance.² CB 120994 would authorize SPD use of pursuit mitigation technology, such as StarChase, which SPD is planning to immediately acquire should this legislation be approved. StarChase is a pursuit mitigation technology that consists of a GPS-enabled projectile (“dart”) propelled by a compressed air launcher which is designed to attach to a target vehicle by means of adhesive and/or magnets and provide short-term location tracking. The tracking dart, containing GPS tracking unit and battery with an estimated eight hour run time, can be deployed by a handheld launcher resembling a rifle or by a vehicle-mounted launcher affixed to the front of a police vehicles. The SIR describes a planned deployment of 25 StarChase units over the initial two year period.

SPD pursuit mitigation tracking devices would be managed by the Real-Time Crime Center (RTCC) and data captured via this technology would be analyzed through the RTCC using vendor software. Data transmitted by the darts include date, time, location, battery life, and vehicle speed. This data would be directly accessible by authorized patrol, investigations, and RTCC staff, as well as Office of Inspector General staff for the purpose of conducting audits. Officers trained in use of vehicle pursuit mitigation technology would be authorized to deploy trackers in instances where a determination of probable cause or reasonable suspicion necessary to stop a vehicle has been made.

Fiscal Impact

The Summary and Fiscal Note for this legislation states that the first two years of costs associated with the acquisition and deployment of pursuit mitigation technology, estimated at \$250,000 total, will be covered by a grant awarded to SPD by the State Department of Commerce.³ Costs to maintain this technology beyond the initial two year period are estimated at \$37,500 per year ongoing, which would come from the General Fund if other fund sources are not identified.

Next Steps

The Committee will have a summary briefing, discussion, and possible vote on this legislation on June 10th.

cc: Ben Noble, Director

² See: Seattle Municipal Code 14.18.020F.

³ These grant funds were included in the 2024 Year-End Grant Acceptance Ordinance (Ord. 127149) passed by Council on November 21, 2024.