

# UK road police get 3D laser scanners to survey crash sites in minutes

TECHNOLOGY

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*Leica Geosystems*

In an effort to cut-down on congestion caused by road accidents, police forces across England will be awarded 3D laser scanning cameras this month so crashes can be more quickly surveyed and cleared up.

Right now a car crash on a busy motorway will see the area cordoned off by police, so the collision can be meticulously documented for insurance and court proceedings. The location is painstakingly photographed and analysed with measuring tape.

The resulting traffic jams are not just a frustrating pain, they're a dent in the country's economy. £1 billion a year is lost to motorway closures, as detailed in a May 2011 government report on tackling congestion caused by motorway closures. In 2010, the report shows, there were more than 18,000 motorway closures lasting a total of more than 20,000 hours. Using 3D laser scanners could reduce incident clear up times by 39 minutes, on average. The officer lands a hefty camera on a tripod -- it looks like a turret from *Portal* -- and the laser-based device pans over the area. In about four minutes it captures millions of separate data points at a sub-millimetre resolution.

Only four sweeps are needed to render an entire 360-degree model of the scene and spit the data file onto a nearby laptop. The entire operation can be done in just 20 minutes, and then motorway officers can begin to clear the cars and reopen the road.

The cameras -- which cost about £50,000-£60,000 thousand each and are made by the Austrian based RIEGL and the Swiss outfit Leica Geosystems -- will show where the cars are located relative to each

other, how the vehicles skidded and collided, and other evidence. This will be used in court and for insurance.

The Department for Transport has put aside £2.7 million in funding, which will buy 37 scanners for 22 different police forces. 38 police forces in England have responsibility for policing the strategic road network, but they had to bid to secure the scanners. Those with a wide geographical influence, lots of accidents in their district and motorways and major A roads under their jurisdiction got the most scanners.

The police forces will start to receive their grants this month, in January 2012, and will begin to roll-out the laser turrets in the coming weeks.

<http://www.wired.co.uk/news/archive/2012-01/03/3d-laser-scanners>