Facial Recognition Inquiry

Thank you for your letter of 19 December 2019 regarding use of facial recognition technology within British Transport Police (BTP).

BTP does not currently deploy any facial recognition technology.

The railway is a CCTV rich environment and CCTV plays an important role in the investigation of crime and protecting vulnerable people. BTP do not own any of the fixed camera estate on the rail network and access is governed by Information Sharing Agreements BTP has with the system owner. In Scotland BTP has Information Sharing Agreements with Network Rail and Scotrail.

BTP issues body worn video (BWV) to officers across the Force. The quality of images collected by BWV are high quality digital images and would have the capability to be used for facial recognition however BTP does not currently use the images for that purpose.

The Force routinely shares images from both CCTV systems and BWV with other police forces, including Police Scotland. This is a reciprocal arrangement used for evidential purposes or for the identification of suspects but not for facial recognition.

BTP has not purchased any technology specifically for facial recognition but does have a software package which contains a facial recognition algorithm. Adobe Lightroom, which is used in our CCTV Department and Force Intelligence Bureau, contains a limited ability to match faces. This software is primarily used by the Force to prepare CCTV evidence for court and has recently been used to help investigate serious offences. The software's facial recognition capability is not used by the Force.

Paul Crowther CBE
Chief Constable
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