

Washington State Patrol
Hit & Run Alert - Pilot Program
Report



Executive Summary

Engrossed House Bill 1125, passed during the 2023 legislative session, requiring Washington State Patrol to administer a pilot program that implements a hit and run alert system (yellow alert system) notifying the public when a hit and run accident resulting in a fatality or substantial bodily harm has occurred and is being investigated by law enforcement.

The Washington State Patrol must post on traffic message boards or share on public communication systems any identifying information acquired including, but not limited to, a complete or partial license plate number or a description of the vehicle. Each alert must be posted or shared as such for at least 24 hours.

Yellow Alert → Hit & Run Alert

To mitigate any potential misunderstandings within the community, the Washington State Patrol, in partnership with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), has taken a proactive step to designate a specific name for the alert system. This thoughtful decision was made to foster clarity and enhance public comprehension, ultimately promoting a more informed understanding of the alert protocols in place.

The Process

The Hit & Run Alert empowers enforcement agencies to request the WSP to issue a public alert following a hit-and-run.

For the Hit & Run Alert to be activated, certain criteria must be met, including the following:

- A fatal or substantial bodily harm must occur;
- A complete or partial license plate number; or
- Description of the vehicle

When a Hit & Run Alert request meets the established criteria, WSP coordinates with the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), which has the authority to activate and manage alerts on electronic freeway message signs across designated state routes. These signs display urgent information about the suspect vehicle to enlist the public's assistance in locating it.

Alert details are also shared through WSP's regional social media platforms (Instagram and X) and are encouraged to be posted by the original investigating agency to expand public awareness.

The public plays a critical role in this effort. Anyone who sees the suspect vehicle or has information related to the incident is urged to contact law enforcement immediately. Public cooperation is key to holding offenders accountable for the consequences of the crash, including injuries, property damage, and medical costs.

WASHINGTON STATE PATROL

HIT & RUN ALERT

FLEEING VEHICLE IN HIT & RUN COLLISION

**Vehicle: GRAY 2006
NISSAN ARMADA**

**LICENSE PLATE:
(CALIFORNIA)
5XKF504**



Not actual vehicle

THIS HIT & RUN ALERT HAS BEEN ACTIVATED BY THE WASHINGTON STATE PATROL.
LAST SEEN I-5, AT EXIT FOR 220TH ST SW (MP179) IN MOUNTLAKE TERRACE, ON WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22 AT 9:38 PM, HEADED SOUTHBOUND. VEHICLE HAS PASSENGER SIDE DAMAGE.

IF SEEN, CALL 9-1-1

Local media outlets are encouraged to disseminate alert information to further enhance law enforcement's ability to identify and apprehend hit-and-run drivers with community support.

Hit & Run Data Summary *(September 1, 2023 – May 31, 2025)*

- Number of Hit & Run Alerts issued: 5
- Arrests resulting directly from Hit & Run Alerts: 1
- Total hit & run collisions reported statewide: 39,584
- Hit & run collisions involving a fatality or substantial bodily harm: 5,180
- Arrests made in fatal or serious injury hit & run cases statewide: **requested data is not available through either the Office of Administrative Courts or the Washington Association of Sheriffs & Police Chiefs.*

Conclusion

The Hit & Run Alert system, while valuable, has limited utility in its current form. Enhancing its effectiveness will likely require additional resources for law enforcement, such as increased deployment of license plate readers and recording cameras. These tools would make it easier to meet current alert activation criteria and could lead to more arrests and successful prosecutions.

However, expanding the alert criteria to allow activation based solely on a vehicle description—without requiring at least a partial license plate—poses significant risks. Such a change could result in overuse of the system, potentially overwhelming 911 call centers and law enforcement agencies with unverified sightings. The current criteria align with protocols used for missing person alerts when utilizing electronic freeway message signs, maintaining consistency and operational integrity.

Implementing enhanced surveillance tools also presents several challenges, including financial costs, infrastructure placement limitations, and public concerns regarding privacy and government overreach. These considerations would require careful political and cultural navigation.

While removing the license plate requirement might increase the number of alerts issued, it also raises the likelihood of mistaken identification, placing undue pressure on innocent individuals driving similar vehicles.

Given the ongoing rise in hit-and-run collisions—particularly those involving fatalities or serious injuries—the state must continue to thoughtfully and decisively evaluate all possible strategies to improve deterrence, support investigations, and strengthen accountability.

