

Washington Driver's Licenses to Carry EPC Gen 2 Inlays

The state will issue the RFID-enabled driver's licenses on a voluntary basis next year, to test if the technology can improve traffic flow across the Canadian border.

By Mary Catherine O'Connor

July 30, 2007—[Washington State's Department of Licensing](#) has decided to deploy a technology trial of an RFID-enabled driver's license. The agency says it will work with [Digimarc](#), a Beaverton, Ore., provider of personal identification systems for government and commercial applications, to implement the pilot.

In March of this year, Washington governor Christine Gregoire authorized the department to design the specialized driver's license for border crossings between the state and Canada. In addition to having an RFID inlay, the license (which will be called an Identocard) will also possess a digital watermark and other authenticators, and will give Washingtonians an alternative to carrying U.S. passports at land border crossings between Canada and Washington (see [Washington Examines RFID for Licenses](#)).

Gigi Zenk, communications director for the Washington State Department of Licensing, says that passive EPC Gen 2 UHF tags will be embedded in the licenses used in the pilot project, which is expected to run until mid-2009. The purpose of the pilot will be to test the RFID and other technological features of the cards to ensure that they will work as expected. Details regarding the pilot and the procedures pilot participants and border patrol will take at the checkpoints have not yet been released, though the program will be voluntary. Any Washington resident interested in obtaining an RFID-enabled driver's license can apply for one; other residents will continue to receive the standard license.

The Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative (WHTI), enacted in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, will require U.S. citizens crossing land or sea borders between the United States and Canada, Mexico, Bermuda and the Caribbean to prove their identity by presenting a valid U.S. passport or a People Access Security Service (PASS) card, which the [U.S. Department of Homeland Security](#) (DHS) is developing as an alternative to passports. This requirement may be enforced as early as Jan. 31, 2008.

The DHS has preapproved the use of the RFID-enabled Washington State driver's licenses as an alternative to showing a U.S. passport or PASS card at border crossings between Washington and Canada, as long as the cards carry passive UHF EPC Gen 2 inlays, which the department has selected for the PASS cards it plans to issue for land border crossings. This will allow the Identocards to be readable by the same interrogators as those that will be used to read PASS cards.

In selecting EPC Gen 2 technology for the WHTI's PASS card program, the DHS said the tags' 20 feet of read range could facilitate speedy verification of PASS card carriers at borders. However, Congress has delayed funding the program in reaction to concern over the lack of security features supported on EPC Gen 2 RFID inlays, as well as the swiftness with which the DHS chose the technology.

Representatives of RFID technology vendors that manufacture high-frequency (HF) RFID inlays—which have a very short read range, but also support anticloning and other security features the EPC UHF inlays lack—have been lobbying Congress to push for technology trials to compare EPC inlays with HF tags before the department rolls out the PASS cards to citizens (see [RFID Vendors Brief Congress on PASS Card Security](#)). Opponents say that EPC tags' lack of security could lead to the tags being read by unauthorized parties, who could then encode the card's unique ID number onto a fraudulent ID.

Digimarc, which provides Washington's current driver's licenses, says that as part of its Identocard issuing process, it will compare facial biometric scans of applicants to ensure that no individual will be able to apply for and receive more than one card. It also notes that all Identocards will be manufactured at a centralized, secure facility, ensuring that RFID and other security features on the cards are controlled throughout the card-manufacturing process.

RELATED_ARTICLES Washington State hopes that because of the EPC Gen 2 tag's long read range, the RFID-enabled cards will facilitate the flow of traffic crossing its border with Canada. Long queues often form at the Blaine, Wash., border checkpoint, and both Washington and British Columbia, the province bordering Washington, are looking for a means of facilitating smoother traffic flow—especially since Vancouver will host the 2010 Winter Olympics.

According to Washington's Department of Licensing, no personally identifiable data will be encoded to the inlay in each card—just a unique ID correlated with the driver's personal information on a secure database, accessible by agents who work for the [U.S. Customs and Border Protection](#) (CBP). Zenk says the specifics of the program—such as whether Identocard holders will be able to proceed through the border crossings without stopping, or if they will be interviewed by CBP agents—have not yet been established by the CBP.

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