

## TSA Hassling Drivers on America's Highways: Mission leap, not mission creep

The TSA's "Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response." ( VIPR)

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Not content with hassling air passengers at airports across the country, the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) is now implementing plans to stop vehicles traveling America's highways and byways, in the hope of finding terrorists and other lawbreakers. The acronym that government brainiacs have concocted for this intrusive program is "VIPR" — short for the "Visible Intermodal Prevention and Response."

Last month, Tennessee proudly announced it had partnered with the TSA to become the first state to implement an extensive VIPR program. Volunteer State officials have dubbed their program the less catchy "First Observer Highway Security Program."

To illustrate how this new program works, TSA and the Tennessee Highway Patrol recently spent a day bothering truck drivers and passengers by subjecting their cargoes to exhaustive searches. They also warned drivers — in keeping with a common pastime at TSA and its parent agency, the Department of Homeland Security, of developing a nation of snitches — to "say something if they see something" that looks suspicious.

According to Bill Gibbons, Tennessee's Department of Safety and Homeland Security commissioner, these security checkpoints, which are manned by law enforcement units festooned in paramilitary outfits, are absolutely necessary because terrorists are poised to strike our nation's roadways.

Although the initial VIPR searches in Tennessee have been limited to trucks, security officials are also cautioning car drivers to keep their eyes open for potentially illicit activity; after all, anyone on the road could be a terrorist. In fact, VIPR programs in other states have not been limited to trucks, but have in fact targeted buses and trains as well.

According to a June report in The Daily Caller, the TSA has "conducted more than 8,000 VIPR operations in the past 12 months alone, including more than 3,700 operations in mass transit and passenger railroad venues."

Not surprisingly, TSA is citing the expanded VIPR program as an excuse to request more funds from Congress; this despite the complete lack of any evidence the program has accomplished anything other than massively inconvenience people and tie up traffic. State and local law enforcement officials like the program because they can use it to secure additional federal funds. VIPR also has become a way for law enforcement to find evidence of other crimes without resorting to traditional law enforcement work, such as investigating

and securing warrants.

The fact is, the VIPR program is more about money and security theater — showing people the government is “doing something” — than it is about true, effective security.

That’s why this latest example of “mission leap” at TSA is unlikely to stop anytime soon.

*Bob Barr represented Georgia’s Seventh District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1995 to 2003. He provides regular commentary to Daily Caller readers.*

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