LOCAL NEWS

Dec 5, 2022, 5:59 PM

BY MICKI GAMEZ

KIRO Newsradio Traffic Reporter

Washington state will now allow you to take a photo of your vehicle registration and store it on your cell phone, tablet, or electronic device.

“Both your registration and your proof of insurance can be stored electronically,” said Tim Meyer, King County Sheriff’s Office’s spokesperson. WA’s new vehicle registration law reinvents itself for modern world, many residents asked questions and posed opinions since the announcement. One question asked, above all, was whether or not you physically had to hand your phone over to the officer.

Do you have to hand over/surrender your phone/device or can they perform their required task with it never leaving your possession? Trying to see if this opens up illegal search and seizure opportunities…

— Aaron Matlock (@just\_pedal) December 3, 2022

They have a scanner called SECTOR that scans the bar code. I do not believe you have to “surrender” your phone. Just like you don’t have to surrender your phone to show proof of insurance when you have it saved on in your pictures.

— Micki Gámez (Lisa Michaela Gámez) (@onairmichelle) December 3, 2022

Short answer? Your device should never leave your possession.

“We have no cause for us to take an electronic device. In practice, it wouldn’t be done,” Meyer said. “We are going to see if you have proof of insurance, and we may come up and scan the bar code off your registration … whether it’s the actual paper or photocopy.”

For example, if you get pulled over, when the officer asks for your license, insurance, and proof of registration, you can show your phone (as in hold it in your hand and let the officer look) as you hand over your driver’s license.

Meyer said officers don’t want to be responsible for dropping a phone and cracking the screen. Furthermore, Washington has pretty strict protections against unlawful search and seizure and that extends to your device.

So, the worry that officers can take a phone or tablet back to their cars and search it at will — the courts and policies would take issue with that.