Open Data User Group (ODUG)
Police National Stolen Vehicle Data
August 2013

Name of dataset: Police National Stolen Vehicle Data

1. Summary

- The Police National Computer (PNC) holds a crucial data set containing the details of stolen vehicles. Since 1 Oct 2012 it has been under the responsibility of the Home Office.

- The average cost for a victim of car theft is estimated at **£2,345** which aggregates to **£404m** per year to victims of car crime. The latest statistic from the ONS report that **79,829** vehicles were stolen between Apr-12 and Mar-13.

- The **economic benefits** of the reduction of car crime are clear, with estimated potential savings of **more than £2 billion per year**. The **environmental** and **social benefits** of a reduced number of stolen cars include safer roads and a reduction in police time dealing with this theft.

- The risk of releasing this data as open data is **low** because the data does not contain personal information and is already available to paying organisations.

- One ODUG data request dates back to April 2012. Recent email communication with PNC has indicated that the process of releasing this dataset is fairly advanced but it has currently stalled.

ODUG recommends that:
- *The Home Office should immediately release the Police National Stolen Vehicle Data under an Open Government Licence (OGL) including police reports and all vehicle details including the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN). Registered keeper details are personal information and should not be released.*

2. Context

- The Police National Computer (PNC) was started in 1974 with *Stolen Vehicles* as its initial database. Its scope has greatly increased over time and a 2009 report indicates that it now contains 55 million vehicle records.[1]
- Responsibility for the provision of this service was transferred to the Home Office on 1 October 2012. It published a guide, which is accessible [here].
- ONS estimates show a significant historic trend; in 2012/13 a vehicle-owning household is around *4 times less likely* to become a victim of vehicle-related theft than in 1995. This staggering reduction is attributed, amongst others factors, to changes in technology and infrastructure, including security technology.
- According to the 22 July 2013 PNC guide the database holds details of UK registered vehicles which are exactly the same as those held by the DVLA. These include:
  - vehicle details: registration number, make, colour, and modifications of vehicles as well as details of cherished transfers of registration plates;
  - registered keeper details: name, address, and date since acquired;
  - DVLA markers;
  - police reports; and
- **The direct cost** of running the PNC is estimated as £14.6m. It runs on a shared infrastructure which supports a wide range of other systems.
- The Home Office's policy on "[Making roads safer]" does *not* include a reference to stolen vehicles.

3. Benefits of an open release

- The average cost for a victim of car theft is estimated at **£2,345** resulting in a cost of **£404m** per year to victims of car crime in aggregate. The latest statistic from the ONS records that **79,829** vehicles were stolen between Apr-12 to Mar-13.
- **Economic benefits** of the reduction of car crime are clear. ONS estimates potential benefits of more than £2 billion per year.[2] Moreover, an open release of this data is expected to stimulate economic activity and innovation through the delivery of novel or cheaper reference checking services to the public.
- **Environmental** and **social benefits** of a reduced number of stolen cars are, for example, safer roads and a reduction in police time dealing with this theft.
- Examples of open data show that cheaper, less restrictive access to datasets can dramatically increase demand, which can result in a **positive spiral** which generally results in a higher quality dataset. A dataset of the highest possible quality is important for the stolen vehicle data, given its central role in fighting crime.
- Opening up this data would also, potentially, lead to more public engagement with the police, to help them resolve stolen vehicle cases and result in an overall

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[1] http://www.npia.police.uk/en/docs/Business_Plan_2009-2010distilled.pdf

[2] Sources: Alliance against crime 2011 report, OFT report 2010, ACPO, the AA, Motor Insurance Bureau, Office for National Statistics.

reduction in insurance claims and costs as more vehicles are recovered and restored to their owners.
- Case studies of how the stolen vehicle data can create additional economic value are included in the [benefit case for the DVLA bulk data](#).

4. Concerns and risks around an open release

- **Loss in revenue**
  The Stolen Vehicle data is provided to existing recipients without charge, so publication would not result in any loss of revenue to the Home Office.

- **Loss in "valuable intelligence"**
  It is claimed that police forces are routinely notified if they receive a query about a vehicle with a lost or stolen marker and that this is valuable intelligence. There is a doubt whether this happens on a significant scale. In fact, an open release might enhance this information by increasing public awareness through access to the data.

- **Disclosure of the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN)**
  As argued in the [benefit case for the DVLA bulk data](#) the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) field should be fully released because the VIN is visible from outside the vehicle on almost all modern vehicles manufactured since 2003. However, an alternative solution might be to censor this field and only releasing the last two digits.

- **Privacy**
  The Stolen Vehicle Data only affects privacy if the car is matched to the individual. This may happen via third parties, who collect various amounts of data as part of their customer relationship management. Ultimately, this practice is covered under general privacy and marketing laws and is remote from the open release of the Stolen Vehicle Data.

- **Residual risk**
  The residual risk is low because the data does not contain personal information and is already available to paying organisations.

Annex A

A.1 Data set as described by PNC Services
VRM - 7 Characters
Chassis Frame - 20 Characters
Creation Date - 8 Characters (Format MMDDYYYY)
Police Force - 4 Characters (e.g. 01HQ, 25UC etc)
Make - 12 Character (only first 12 characters used)
Model - 4 Characters (only first 4 character used e.g. TRAN for Transit, Pass for Passat etc)
Report Type - 2 Characters
- 01 = Lost report Added
- 02 = Destroyed report Added
- 91 = Found report added or the lost report has been deleted/weeded
- 92 = Destroyed report Deleted)

A.2 Key Benefits and Data Theme

Key Benefits
Data release goals rated in the scope of ODUG key benefit areas.

Key Benefits

	1	2	3	4	5
Efficiency					X
Environmental		X			
Growth		X			
Social			X		
Transparency	X				

Data Theme Fit
Data Request rated in the scope of ODUG key data themes.

Data Theme Fit

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Land & Property	X									
Environment			X							
Social				X						
Orgs. & Companies			X							
Education	X									
Transport									X	
Financial							X			
Health	X									

| Not at all | Some | Applies | Fully applies | Single goal |