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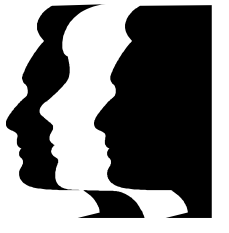


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Are Red Light Cameras Stacking Up?

Towns are removing cameras - viewing them as an ineffective and costly method of traffic enforcement.

by Ashley Murphy

It's a beautiful day as you walk outside to check your mailbox. You sift through your mail and come across an envelope that you study for a moment. You open it and pull out a piece of paper stating that you have just been cited for running a red light by a red light camera and now must pay a fine. Next thing you

know, all of your neighbors are out on their front porches looking in your direction and wondering what all the screaming is about.

Well, maybe its not that dramatic, but those little pieces of paper can be a bit unnerving. Here's a closer look at the red light cameras here in our hometown of Cleveland, TN.

The general purpose of red light cameras, or RLCs, are to

keep people from running lights after they turn red, to help reduce traffic accidents at intersections, and to keep motorists safer all around. Many believe the main reason cities use photo enforced citations is for revenue purposes, however, after reviewing the statistics, *The People News* discovered that isn't always the case.

The Cleveland City Council

decided that traffic cameras needed to be installed at certain intersections within the city. A contract was signed with Traffipax, Inc., a supplier of traffic cameras headquartered out of Maryland, in February 2008. Under the contract, no citation commission is given to Traffipax, however, the City of Cleveland pays \$3,350 per month per camera. Traffipax maintains the cameras and sorts through the photos before passing them on to the Cleveland Police Department. In September, there were only three intersections equipped with the traffic cameras, but now there are five. This brings the total to \$16,750 per month spent on traffic cameras.

Traffic cameras are located at the following intersections: Paul Huff Pkwy./Stuart Rd. at North Lee Hwy./Keith St., 25th St. at Keith St., 20th St. at Keith St., Raider Dr. at Keith St., and 25th St. at Peerless Rd. Three of the five traffic cameras were turned on in September and went into a warning period between September 15, 2008 and October 15, 2008. During those 30 days, drivers that ran a red light received a Warning of Citation, which did not come with any fines. Drivers that have received citations since October 15, 2008 haven't been as lucky.

The Traffipax cameras that are used here in Cleveland are digital cameras that capture photos of vehicles running red lights. If a light signal has turned red and a vehicle crosses the stop line, the camera will be activated by induction loops or non-invasive laser detection. The date, times, and location are also recorded with the photos. The photos captured are then transmitted to Traffipax where

they are vetted by Traffipax employees. Any valid images of violations are then sent to the Cleveland Police Department to be vetted again, then citations are eventually sent out to the registered owners of the vehicle in question. Each citation is \$50 and must be paid within 30 days to avoid penalties. A delinquent citations will cost \$154.75, the extra to cover court costs and the state litigation tax. These citations do not accrue points against one's driving record or car insurance.

Another reason for RLCs; to reduce traffic accidents at intersections. Barbie Watson, of the Cleveland Police Department, provided *The People News* with the following numbers, broken down by intersection: Between January 2008 and September 2008, there were 34 accidents at Paul Huff/North Lee, 27 accidents at 25th/Keith, 5 accidents at 20th/Keith, 1 accident at Raider/Keith, and 19 accidents at 25th/Peerless. Numbers for the two and half month period of October 15, 2008 to December 2008, after the cameras were installed, were also given. At the intersection of Paul Huff/North Lee there were 4 accidents, at 25th/Keith there were 7 accidents, at 20th/Keith there were 2 accidents, at Raider/Keith there were 4 accidents, and 5 accidents at 25th/Peerless. All intersections are actually showing a decrease in accidents, except one. Raider Dr. at Keith St. has actually shown an increase of three, with 20th St. at Keith St. not far from breaking even. Rear end collisions remain the leader in types of accidents in Cleveland with 54 of the 81 crashes in the months of 2008 before the cameras were installed and 12 of the 22

crashes in the months of 2008 after the cameras were installed.

While local statistics are showing a 48% reduction in accidents, other statistics taken over a period of years are questioning the effectiveness of traffic cameras. The city of Dalton, Ga. recently announced it will be ending the red light camera program that has been in effect there since 2006. According to Dalton City Mayor David Pennington RLCs are costing more money than they are bringing in and aren't making the city any safer. Dalton isn't the first to stop the program, Norcross, Suwanee, and Snellville, Ga. have all stopped their programs due to great monetary losses. City officials in Rome, Ga. are now considering ending their program as well due to an approximate \$10,000 monthly loss.

Since Cleveland's program started, there have been 1,792 tickets issued totaling \$89,600. As of March 17, 2009, the city has received an estimated \$71,361.50 in citation payments. An outstanding balance of \$1,000 is owed on citations sent out before January 1, 2009 and \$17,343 is owed to the city for all citations sent out since the first of the year, plus \$1,361.75 accrued in late fees and other penalties. While the numbers aren't showing any losses in the recent months, the city is coming very close to breaking even with the camera costs each month. City Councilman Richard Banks stated the city is "not in this to make money." If revenue isn't generated from the use of RLCs, are they still worth it? As the months progress and statistics increase, the Cleveland City Council will be able to better evaluate the effectiveness of red light cameras and their benefits to the community.



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