

## The traffic-camera scam

by *The-Washington-Times*

Arlington, Falls Church, Fairfax and Virginia Beach are preparing to stimulate public spending with new red-light camera programs. This is part of a push to fill government budget shortfalls by ramping up tickets for moving violations. Virginia is driving the wrong way down this street.

After banning the commonwealth's ticket-camera programs in 2005, the General Assembly is again opening the door to this lucrative revenue stream. Proponents claim that traffic cameras enhance public safety, but two Georgia state Republican lawmakers are calling the safety bluff. Last year, Rep. Barry Loudermilk, District 14 state House Republican, and Sen. Jack Murphy, District 27 state Senate Republican, introduced a bill to add a few restrictions on the use of traffic cameras. One provision requires the addition of one extra second to the duration of the yellow warning period at any intersection where red-light cameras are used. The law took effect three months ago, and the results underscore the revenue-orientation of photo-enforcement programs.

"The addition of one second has made a significant reduction in red-light violations," Norcross, Ga., Police Chief Dallas Stidd wrote in a Feb. 5 memorandum. "We along with other jurisdictions have seen a significant decrease in citations. This will cause a shortfall in our budget for this program." After revenue projections were diminished, the safety argument was abandoned by the Norcross City Council, which voted March 2 to terminate its red-light camera program. The Georgia towns of Duluth, Lilburn, Rome, Snellville and Suwanee all cancelled their photo-enforcement programs when violations dropped as much as 80 percent due to the extra second for yellow lights.

This progress exposes the dirty little secret of the red-light camera industry. As reported on [thenewspaper.com](http://thenewspaper.com), about 80 percent of citations are issued to vehicles photographed making split-second, technical violations that are in most cases invisible to the unaided eye. The trigger on red-light cameras in Fremont, Calif., was so quick that the shutter clicked faster than the signal itself could change from yellow to red. According to the California State Auditor, the city was forced to cancel 459 tickets taken for violations "during which both the yellow and red lights were displayed on some photographs."

The truth about traffic cameras is that the real motivation behind the programs is revenue, not safety. For this reason, the systems are often rigged to guarantee a large yield of tickets. In Fairfax County, at the intersection of U.S. 50 and Fair Ridge Drive, the yellow light was shortened just three days after the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors signed a contract to implement red-light cameras in October 1999. When the longer yellow time was restored in 2001, violations decreased by 90 percent.

In 2007, the Virginia Department of Transportation documented a 29 percent increase in accidents and a 19 percent increase in injuries at red-light camera intersections. This is because drivers slam on their brakes or speed up to try to avoid getting a camera ticket, thus causing more accidents. If Virginia lawmakers are really interested in safety rather than revenue, they will follow Georgia's lead and lengthen yellow lights and ditch their traffic cameras.

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