

FHwA Study Analysis
By Greg Mauz, NMA

Camera promoters everywhere - from a politician in Pennsylvania to an engineer in Lubbock, Texas to the DOT of California - keep misrepresenting the 2005 Federal Highway Administration Study as the holy grail of studies proving that red-light ticket cameras reduce crashes and injuries and “saves lives”. Nothing could be further from the truth.

Despite numerous reliability problems, the stated “results” actually show cameras cause a negative impact on safety.

“Safety Evaluation of Red Light Cameras” (April 2005) analyzed data from 7 jurisdictions containing 132 ticket camera sites in this “final study”.

This becomes at least the third big study for the very biased FHwA, which provides “education materials”, website, phone numbers, and even money for RLC demonstration projects (your tax dollars). Congressman Dick Arney tried to stop this practice.

The FHwA is allied with the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS) and the National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running - a fake advocacy group entirely bought and paid for by 3 big camera companies. Both of these groups are motivated by huge ticket camera monetary profits.

Page one, of the Executive Summary, begins by repeating the same 15-year-old deception that red light running (violation) crashes are a “major safety problem”. Like “speeding”, RLV crashes have NEVER been a “major safety problem”. About “1,000 fatalities annually” equals a mere 2% of all traffic fatalities nationwide (43,000 annually). Objective researchers show perspective. But that would question the supposed need for RLTC’s. The truth is: there remains no honest need for camera enforcement of any kind.

For the record: Despite 220 cities with RLTC’s, RLV fatalities have increased. Florida - without cameras - recorded a -20% drop in RLV fatalities from 2001 - 2005 [“Statistics”, Mauz report, pages 34-39].

It should be noted that at least four of the seven cities providing data

for this study had integrity problems. The “Empirical Bayes estimation/prediction system” numbers are suspect. Clearly defined before versus after data and year by year data was NOT documented. Red light violation crashes “could not be identified separately” and are morphed into the much larger group of right-angle crashes.

Under “Discussion and Conclusions” (page 73) and “Results” (table 13, page 63) camera promoters love to proclaim that right-angle crashes decreased by -25% (24.6%) while rear-end crashes increased only +15% (14.9%). These percentages are NOT supported by most studies which often record +70% or more increases of rear-end collisions (Australia, NC, Oxnard and VA). Remember perspective? The “numbers” show -379 angle crashes versus +375 rear-enders or no honest safety improvements.

Camera promoters usually fail to report the next part of the results: rear-end (definite) injury crashes rose +24% while angle injuries only decreased by -15.7%. These figures do not properly account for expensive, long-term, painful whiplash (or other) injuries discovered days after the crash (page 66). The “numbers” show -55 angle (minor) injuries versus +32 rear-end injuries. These insignificant results remain less than normal, positive historical trends for over a 2 ½ year “after” period.

Admittedly unable to declare RLTCs as a safety success (page 64) the biased authors estimated the crash financial costs - right-angle versus rear-end. The supposed result was a “\$39,000 economic benefit per site year”.

This meaningless “benefit” (the cost of one minor injury crash) is an estimate with disclaimers. For example: one extra fatal crash (\$4 million) would negate all the “benefits” of an entire RLTC jurisdiction.

Additional findings in this study already negate these “benefits”. Table 15 (page 64) shows that the [no camera] control sites recorded a -8.5% (-290) decrease in right-angle crashes while rear-enders only increased +1.8% (+71). In perspective (but not mentioned) these findings equate to a net 6% reduction in overall crashes or better than the RLTC sites. The authors attempt to credit this positive (good) result as “spillover effect” but admit the theory lacked credibility. The phenomenon is a total fabrication of camera promoters (see Mauz report, pages 30-31). The plain truth is that doing nothing (control sites) consistently trounces RLTC sites in safety

improvements (NC, Oxnard, Winnipeg). Even worse, table 18 on page 68 revealed a higher percentage of “severe angle crashes” after red-light ticket camera programs in two jurisdictions, while the other five showed no decreases. In other words: there occurred some extra moderate and serious injuries, plus a few extra deaths after cameras. Shouldn’t one extra death be unacceptable?

How far the standard for success has fallen. Camera promoters promises began with RLTCs “saving countless lives”. Then, cameras were going to “significantly reduce” ALL signal-related crashes and injuries. Later, it became a trade-off between more “minor” rear-end collisions versus fewer “severe” angle crashes. And now they have to resort to spin-doctoring estimated financial crash costs in a desperate attempt to salvage some positive aspect from a totally failed “safety” program.

After 10 years of promoting red-light [ticket] cameras as a “life saving” device, this, their own “final study”, showcases just the opposite. Cameras caused an understated net increase of injury crashes, including a few extra moderate/serious angle injuries and a few extra fatalities.

When even camera promoter studies show more injuries and fatalities (FHWA, Virginia DOT, Oxnard and England DOT) it’s time for this safety façade to end. In the interest of human life, ALL ticket camera programs must be dismantled permanently.

Greg Mauz is a traffic safety researcher and Texas activist for the National Motorists Association. His 2007 report “Camera Enforcement - A Picture of Fraud” proves - from 7 different analyses - that ticket cameras cause more fatalities. www.motorists.org/mauz.php