

My Word: Greg Mauz

Who needs red-light cameras? Nobody

Where's the problem? Fatalities from red-light violations comprise a mere 2 percent of all U.S. fatalities (about 925 of 43,000).

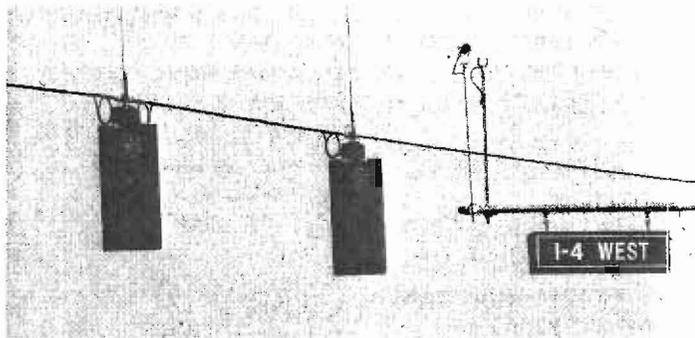
Florida — without cameras placed at intersections — has recorded the greatest decline in red-light-violation fatalities in the nation. From 1996-2000, there were 618 fatal crashes from red-light violations versus only 493 from 2001-2005 — 125 fewer for a 20 percent decline.

Consider also that Florida recorded this improvement while gaining 3 million more drivers. Injuries also dropped more than 10 percent. There is no "safety epidemic," as camera promoters have stated. So why is Orlando installing red-light-ticket cameras at selected intersections?

Ticket cameras violate due-process rights (not privacy), including the right to face your accuser, burden-of-proof issues and right to a fair trial. U.S. mail provides inadequate notification of the violations, and there's no guaranteed delivery. At least 29 percent of vehicle owners ticketed are not the drivers of the car, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, yet they are forced to pay the fine.

A recent poll by MSNBC recorded 62 percent against red-light-ticket cameras among more than 40,000 people who responded. The National Motorists Association, Florida Civil Rights Association, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Florida Department of Transportation and the Legislature reject ticket cameras for various reasons.

In addition to the lack of an honest need, rights violations, extortion of money from inno-



cent people and the lack of public support, ticket cameras usurp more than 70 percent of the public's money from red-light violations less than one second into the red light. These are not "dangerous red-light runners" but folks who honestly mistimed an often unethically short yellow light. Honest cops do not ticket these invisible violations. Camera enforcement's latest scam involves ticketing people for legal right turns on red.

More than 90 percent of severe Florida red-light-violation crashes result from three main factors: driving while intoxicated, attending to emergencies and not paying attention. None of these behaviors or crashes is preventable by using ticket cameras. Promoter statements that cameras save lives are completely absurd.

As a traffic-safety researcher for 22 years, I have written three objective, comprehensive reports on photo enforcement. "Camera Enforcement: A Picture of Fraud" (52 pages at motorists.org/mauz.php) proves from seven different analyses that the cameras cause more crashes, injuries and fatalities. More than 20 other studies support this conclusion.

Camera promoters claim

that rear-end crashes are few, minor and a trade-off with fewer red-light-violation crashes. All deceptions. Rear-end crashes increase, on average, 70 percent with many whiplash and back injuries and some fatalities. This trend of increased rear-end crashes lasts for years and overall injuries rise significantly. In fact, rear-end and all U.S. signal-related deaths have increased since the proliferation of cameras in U.S. cities, according to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Real solutions to improving signal-related traffic safety include: banning ticket cameras, making engineering improvements (including longer yellow lights), enforcing DUI violations, reducing police chases, equipping emergency vehicles with light changers and offering more-comprehensive driver education to encourage paying attention behind the wheel.

Those who endorse ticket cameras are placing government/corporate power and money above human rights and safety. And that's not a pretty picture.

Greg Mauz of Christoval, Texas, is a traffic-safety researcher who formerly lived in South Florida.

www.bhspi.org/mauz/

Orlando Sentinel

Wednesday, September 17, 2008

REACHING 1.2 MILLION PEOPLE WEEKLY IN PRINT AND ONLINE

Traffic-light cameras, in place for only 2 weeks, nab scores of violators. Tempers are flaring.

1,100 ticketed drivers see red

By DAN TRACY
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

Just two weeks after the city turned on the cameras, more than 1,100 motorists have been cited for running red lights by Orlando's new traffic-surveillance system.

Mounted at seven intersections throughout the city, still and video cameras have been catching motorists at all hours and in virtually every type of vehicle, from sports cars to big trucks. Alleged violators receive a photo of the transgression in the mail, plus access to a Web site showing video of their vehicle.

Already, a trickle of \$125 checks is coming into the city from drivers who concede they did not stop when the light went red.

One of those, Michele Biecker of Orlando, addressed her envelope to city of Orlando "thieves" and noted on her check that she likely would have to pay again.

"I hate this city," she wrote. She would not comment when contacted by the *Orlando Sentinel*.

Mike Rhodes, who runs the program and the city's code-enforcement depart-

CAMERAS

FROM PAGE A1

ment, figures Biecker was venting.

"People get upset," he said. "I don't know what else to say. I understand. One hundred and twenty-five dollars is a lot of money."

Biecker shouldn't feel too bad. At least she is not one of the 11 repeat offenders accused so far, including three who will be receiving a \$250 ticket because the fine doubles for the third time.

Motorists who think they have been wrongly accused may appeal to a hearing officer. The first session will be in mid-October.

* So far, about nine in 10 of the violations occurred when the motorist entered the intersection two seconds or less after the light first flashed to red from yellow, city records show.

That, say critics of the system, shows the cameras are too sensitive and make people who might be inadvertently running a light into a violator liable to pay a \$125 fine.

"These are not dangerous actions threatening public safety. Any honest police officer would not issue a ticket because they are too close to call," said Greg Mauz, a self-styled activist from Texas who has been fighting red-light cameras across the country for more than a decade.

see editorial (same day) 9/17

In the long run, Mauz predicted, the city's cameras could increase traffic accidents rather than reduce them because people will slam on their brakes to avoid a ticket, possibly causing rear-end collisions from closely following vehicles. **REs + 70% on average.**

City officials say they have not seen any rear-enders so far and maintain all the tickets issued have been fair. They also contend that once people understand the cameras are operating, they will slow down and drive more safely.

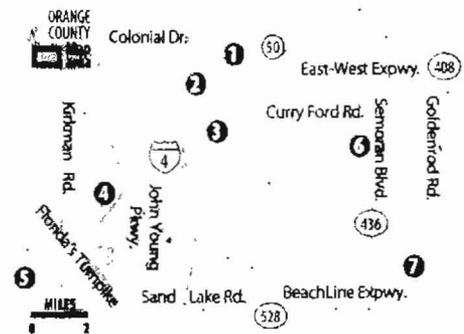
But three public-health professors at the University of South Florida in Tampa maintain their research — which largely agrees with studies done by Mauz — shows that red-light running is not as deadly as many think, accounting for less than 4 percent of the state's yearly traffic fatalities.

The best, cheapest way to reduce red-light running is to increase the length of yellow lights by several seconds and to make sure all lights stay red at intersections for an extra moment or two to allow traffic to clear, said John Large, a USF professor.

Large said the biggest beneficiaries of the camera systems are not drivers but the cities that approve them and the companies that operate them.

WHERE THE CAMERAS ARE

1. Magnolia Ave./Concord St. • Northbound
2. Westmoreland Dr./South St. • Southbound
3. Kaley St./Division Ave. • Eastbound
4. Vineland Rd./Conroy Rd. • East-, west-, southbound
5. Wallace Rd./Turkey Lake Rd. • East-, northbound
6. Michigan St./Dixie Belle Dr. • Westbound
7. Lee Vista Blvd./Goldenrod Rd. • Eastbound



SOURCE: City of Orlando

ORLANDO SENTINEL

"The money is not being used to improve public safety or to improve roads. A large portion is going to private companies," Large said.

Rhodes said the city could make as much as \$500,000 this year, if the number of tickets issued holds steady. The company that leases the equipment and monitors it for the city, Lasercraft of Atlanta, would be paid as much as \$600,000, he said.

Rhodes, however, dismissed the monetary complaint by saying the city's main intent is making its streets safer for drivers and pedestrians. He said he expects the number of tickets to decline as word spreads about the cameras.

Busy intersection

The most red-light running has occurred at Vineland and Conroy roads, with more than 70 percent of the citations. That busy intersection has three of the 10 cameras the city has installed so far.

Rhodes pointed out almost one out of 10 drivers cited is blowing through a light that is red longer than two seconds.

That includes at least four cases when the light had been red more than 40 seconds when the driver crossed the intersection.

Rather than catching people making an innocent mistake, Rhodes said, many are just exhibiting "their [normal] driving habits. . . . You start looking at these [videos and still pictures of violators], and you just shake your head."

Dan Tracy can be reached at dtracy@orlandosentinel.com or 407-420-5444.

PLEASE SEE CAMERAS, A5

*321 tickets less than 1/2 (.5) sec. into red. Unconscionable (no delay)