

## Nation

# Mayor doubts camera's benefits

## Red-light revenue fell when yellow lights got longer

By Larry Copeland  
USA TODAY

DALTON, Ga. — When this city that bills itself as the “Carpet Capital of the World” installed red-light cameras in 2008, revenue poured in from drivers cited for violations.

At \$75 a pop, 6,906 citations were issued that year, mostly for illegal right-on-red turns; 624 citations were issued in February alone.

Then the Georgia Legislature, responding to widespread constituent concerns that red-light cameras were little more than a way to generate revenue for governments, ordered that yellow lights be lengthened by one second at all intersections with traffic cameras. Longer yellow lights would give motorists more time to stop for a red light.

When the law took effect Dec. 31, 2008, citations quickly plummeted. In February 2009, 125 citations were issued from Dalton's cameras. **-80% see +1**

“That sort of exposed the myth of why they're there,” says Mayor David Pennington, an opponent of red-light cameras. “It goes against what I was told to begin with, which is that they are for safety.”

Pennington's criticism of red-light cameras — and their sure stream of revenue — is all the more remarkable considering how hard his city was slammed by the recession: As the housing market collapse squeezed the carpet manufacturing industry, unemployment in Dalton soared from 3.5% in 2007 to 12.5% in 2009, one of the highest in the USA, he says.

Instead of bemoaning the lost revenue, Pennington slashed government spending from \$36 million to just less than \$29 million and cut the city's workforce by about 60 people.

He led efforts to cut property taxes by 20% and the city's business inventory tax by 20% and reduced business license fees by 25%-50%.

“We're one of the few govern-



By Erik S. Lesser for USA TODAY

“Nobody's ever been able to prove to me how these things prevent accidents”: Dalton, Ga., Mayor David Pennington stands at one of the city's intersections where red-light cameras were removed.

ments that are operating in the black at the same time that we cut taxes,” says Pennington, 57, who is in his first term as mayor. He is an independent with a Libertarian streak.

Despite a backlash against cameras in some places, some jurisdictions continue to add them, including about 60 last year, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, which supports traffic cameras. **\$\$\$**

One such community is Muscatine, Iowa, which voted Dec. 17 to install red-light cameras this year. The vote was 6-1, the only “no” vote coming from Robert Howard. “It concerns me whether this is a potential tax revenue source,” he says. “It's set up to encourage governments to possibly change the duration of yellow-light settings, so they can write additional tickets.”

The yellow-light issue addressed by the Georgia Legislature focused on a key debate involving the cameras.

Opponents say that local juris-

dictions often set the cameras with short yellow lights designed to nab more violators and produce more revenue and that an unusually high percentage of violators are cited for illegal right-on-red turns, which cause relatively few crashes. .037%

“Yellow is the key to safety at intersections, not cameras,” says activist Greg Mauz, a longtime camera opponent. “There's a shortage of yellow time at almost

**+1 sec. yellow = 40-75% less RLVs & 30-50% less crashes.**

**Cameras CAUSE MORE crashes, injuries and fatalities. “Camera Enforcement - Charting a Catastrophic Failure” contains 40 studies proving RLTCs cause injury & death. BHSPI.org/mauz/ Also see: “C.E. - A Picture of Fraud”**

**\* Ticket cameras can only usurp enough money - for all profiteers - by engineering malpractice. Illegal/unethically short yellows (and low speed limits) increase revenue but also increase crashes, injuries and fatalities. Cameras make the problem worse.**

every intersection where cameras are.” \*

In Dalton, skepticism about the cameras remains high. “Nobody's ever been able to prove to me how these things prevent accidents,” Pennington says. “If they could, I would change my position.”

At the end of February, Dalton's cameras came down.

► Taking aim at cameras, 1A

# Communities put a halt to red-light cameras

Drivers protest the devices; backers claim safety benefit

By Larry Copeland  
USA TODAY  
JANUARY 18, 2010

Red-light cameras that have been gaining a foothold in many states now face a growing public backlash — and outright removal.

The cameras, billed as safety devices since their introduction in the USA nearly 20 years ago, are increasingly viewed by many motorists as unreasonable revenue generators for hard-up local governments.

Maine, Mississippi and Montana banned red-light cameras last year, joining at least four other states, Nevada, New Hampshire, West Virginia and Wisconsin, says Anne Teigen, a transportation specialist at the National Conference of State Legislatures. State senators in Mis-

souri and Tennessee are sponsoring legislation that would limit cameras. Elsewhere:

► Voters in three cities — Chillicothe and Heath, Ohio, and College Station, Texas — passed referendums in November banning the cameras. "Red-light cameras have never survived a voter referendum," says Greg Mauz, a longtime camera opponent who has researched them extensively. \*

► Nearly 1,000 motorists in south Florida have filed 18 lawsuits against the cameras, saying the devices are unconstitutional because they force drivers to prove their innocence rather than the government to prove their guilt. "I felt as though I had no say," Beverly Baird Boothe, a retired educator, says of her appeal of a citation in Orlando. "There is no democratic process."

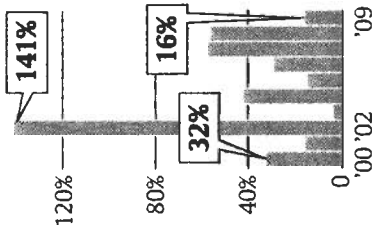
► An Illinois lawmaker who helped bring red-light cameras to the state in 2006 says he'll introduce bills this year to sharply limit their use. "They were sold to

## Lights in Dalton, Ga.

■ Citations plummet, 2A

## Seeing red

The pace of communities installing red-light cameras slowed in 2009. Percent increase in the number of communities installing them:



Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

us in a different manner than what they're being used for," says state Rep. Jack Franks, a Democrat. "The municipalities have put them in areas where they're just to make revenue." He says that since 2006, crashes have increased at half the intersections in Illinois that have cameras, stayed the same at 25% and decreased at 25%.

The rate of communities installing cameras slowed dramatically last year. In 2009, legislators in 30 states debated 90 camera bills, most of which would have expanded their use, Teigen says.

Camera supporters say cameras make intersections safer. The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety's (IIHS) studies in Fairfax, Va., and Oxnard, Calif., found that camera enforcement reduced red-light running violations by about 40%. **← LIE**

Red-light cameras are used in more than 400 communities in 26 states and the District of Columbia. "Cameras are an effective deterrent to people running red lights," says Anne McCartt, vice president for research at IIHS. **Not crash reductions. Yellow is better.**

\* "Camera Enforcement - A Picture of Fraud" (52 pages) & "Charting a Catastrophic Failure" (40 Studies) PROVE Ticket cameras cause more crashes, injuries and fatalities. Greg Mauz, Best Highway Safety Practices Institute, research at bhspi.org/mauz/. (23 yrs. experience) (325-896-2595)