

Red Light Cameras Are A Revenue Producer First And Safety Device Second

For as long as there have been stoplights people have ignored them. The [American Automobile Association's Traffic Safety Culture](#) Index points out that 99% of drivers agree it's not alright to [run a stop light](#). Over 35% of the drivers surveyed admit to blowing a red lighting within thirty-days before answering the survey. That causes wrecks.

Now, the opportunity to save lives is becoming a cash cow. Ending avoidable wrecks at stoplights are reason enough to apply red-light infractions. Cities though don't play their part, and they won't pay for police at each crossing. As a top game, most have introduced motion-activated devices to grab offenders .

The cameras are automated and work 24/7 without human intervention. When the signal becomes red, the device is operating and photographs any vehicle crossing the white line. The image is then transmitted, with the day and time, to the municipality which issues a ticket to the vehicle's registered owner.

The chance to protect lives has become a lottery jackpot of traffic penalties for towns and the businesses selling the cameras.

Dealing With The Devil

The companies behind the red-light cameras fund the device and then negotiate with cities to place the cameras. The cities don't pay anything up front. Instead, they give the contracting company part of the income. Rivalry is fierce. The dollar value of traffic fines grows each year.

The camera providers have been caught bribing town administrators with sports tickets, dinner and money as well as retaining lobbyists to sweeten the deals. Lobbyists work with state legislatures to promote bills calling for the earmarking of traffic enforcement and halt bills which may interfere with that goal.

Rules Changing

The cameras are used for more than just making intersections safer. If vehicle operators could be convinced to be conservative when the light is yellow, accidents would be reduced and the red-light cameras' safety goal would be met.

[Research has shown](#) a proven method to reduce crashes while improving red-light acquiescence is to activate the yellow light quicker and let it stay on longer. Drivers have more time to react and most stop for it. Even the U.S. Department of Transportation has been pushing this technique since the 1960s.

The providers of the cameras have been monkeying around with the suggestion. The contracts in place stipulate best yellow light times and hand out economic punishments if the city increases the yellow period. The result is more citations, more fines and more money disappears into the black hole of corporations.

Bluewash

A tactic employed by politicians and camera providers is the donation of a piece of the profits to a charitable purpose to "bluewash" the money. For example, [Colorado donates \\$500,000 annually to Sungatekids](#), a group fighting domestic abuse.

New York

Often an automated citation is an open-and-shut case. Traffic court judges in New York for the city issuing the tickets and there's not much chance of arguing away the fine. The borough put the cameras up to take your money in the first place.

Some judges are calling foul. Red light cameras are drawing criticism from safety proponents, city planners, and motorists. [Research in The Big Apple shows caution lights are too quick](#) for protection and the cash is being dumped into city coffers. Used as a component of the [Vision Zero](#) drive to reduce pedestrian fatalities, critics say they are causing injuries instead.

New York City's general fund gets over \$26 million each year from the [camera business](#). The nation's longest running program of its type, there are almost 200 cameras at 175 junctions to catch violators.

Robert Sinclair with AAA of New York said, "The plans must be for safety and not income."

New York is standing firm behind its Vision Zero agenda. City authorities point to one statistic which shows pedestrian casualties have declined by 65%. Juan Martinez, former-Director of New York's Strategic Initiative says, "What we find is when persons assume the law will be supported, they stop driving through lights."

As reported by traffic planners, just because the city-wide limit is the same doesn't mean yellow light time should be. Each yellow light in the city is three-seconds, and experts who wrote the book on signal safety point out 3-seconds is too short. The recommended yellow time is 3.5 seconds.

Yellow-caution lights are not always the answer. Each light should be set according to intersection size and the prevailing speed — not the posted speed.

Only then will the streets be safer.