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Subject: Covina council meeting of May 16 - red light cams - 5 more years?

Date: Mon, 15 May 2017 16:51:57 -0700

From: (highwayrobbery.net)

Reply-To:

To: mayor@covina.gov, jking@covina.gov, vlinares@covina.gov,
wallen@covina.gov, jmarquez@covina.gov, pdelach@covina.gov,
cityclerk@covina.gov

5-15-17

Subject and venue: Red light cameras, item CC3, May 16 meeting

Honorable Councilmembers:

Here is some information I hope will be of use to you in your deliberations.

There Is Current Legislation about Rolling Rights

SB 493, now in the Legislature, will halve the fine for rolling right turns - which are 73% of the tickets in Covina. The bill is supported by the auto clubs and the California Association of Highway Patrolmen.

It would also be appropriate to pass along - again - a Dec. 26, 2014 Wall Street Journal interview of the (then) president of one of the largest camera companies:

"Mr. [James] Saunders suggests jurisdictions refrain from issuing a [rolling right] ticket except when a pedestrian is in the crosswalk." The headline was, "Can the Red-Light Camera Be Saved? - Money-hungry politicians discredit a hopeful safety innovation." (A Jan. 22, 2015 column in the Dallas Morning News confirmed the statement The Journal had attributed to Saunders: "When I asked Redflex spokeswoman Jody Ryan about her boss' comments urging cities to lighten up on rolling reds, she answered, "It only makes sense that Jim is going to say, 'Look, we need people to be thoughtful about how they are implementing these programs and how they are issuing citations.' It wasn't that shocking.")

The Rent Is Too High

The proposed rent is 47% higher than what it should be. In 2014 the City of Elk Grove (which has five cameras) negotiated the following rent schedule, based upon the the age of each camera installation.

0 - 4.99 years \$4696
5 - 6.99 years \$4196
7 - 9.99 years \$2000
10+ years \$1500

(The price schedule above can be found in the Elk Grove contract, available from the Elk Grove city clerk. I have not attached a copy of it due to the current ransomware epidemic.)

Based upon Elk Grove's schedule, you should pay no more than \$1500 per camera, not \$2200. If you agree to the \$2200 you will pay an extra \$294,000 of rent over the five years and to break even you will need to issue an extra 2940 tickets (assuming that 2/3 of the tickets issued are paid and that the City receives \$150 of the fine paid).

The extra \$294,000 might possibly be justified by the "upgrades" promised in Schedule 2 of the proposed new contract, but it is impossible to tell as neither the proposed contract nor the staff report says what the upgrades are to be.

New Locations Already Approved?

While Schedule 3 of the proposed new contract lists three new camera locations and says, "The following sites have been selected by the Covina PD and approved by ATS," the staff report doesn't mention the new sites, doesn't say which three of the existing cameras will be removed and relocated, and gives no information about how the new sites were selected.

You Will Be Locked In

The Elk Grove contract (discussed above) allows that city to cancel on 30 days notice, whereas your proposed new contract locks you in for the first two years, with no escape.

What About Safety?

The City of San Francisco has recently reduced ticketing by 76%; during the five-month period September 2016 thru January 2017 they issued just 1273 tickets compared to the average 5310 tickets they issued in the same five-month periods a year and two years before. (For comparison, during September 2016 thru January 2017 Covina issued 2271 tickets - nearly twice as many as Francisco issued during that same period.)

San Francisco's cutback was deliberate and planned, per a letter I got from City Traffic Engineer Ricardo Olea last May:

"You are correct that engineering changes are the most effective way to reduce red light running crashes. We've had a long-standing record of improving intersection safety through signal upgrade improvements and signal timing changes." "We are the process of starting a new Red Light Camera contract which will

reduce the total number of approaches being enforced in San Francisco, keeping some locations we believe are still needed based on crash and citation history."

How did San Francisco arrive at their decision to downsize? In 2015 SFMTA staff did a camera-by-camera examination of the effect the nineteen-year-old program had had upon accidents and found that the installation of a red light camera seldom was followed by a drop in accidents. Instead, the drops occurred after engineering improvements like making the yellows longer, adding an all-red interval (both of which are cheap to do), the addition of an arrow for left turns, or a general upgrade to the signal. (In one instance - see page 12 of the report - staff conceded what one of the graphs shows, that the camera may have had no effect whatsoever.) (The SFMTA has not published their report online; I got it by submitting a public records request. To find a copy of the report, do a Google on - in quotation marks - "SFMTA Red Light Camera Annual Report 2015" and then scroll down to Set # 4 on the webpage which will come up.)

In Covina it is also noticeable that over the years 2007 to 2016 we have not seen the significant drop in ticketing that is supposed to happen in the presence of heavy enforcement. Here are the annual totals of tickets for those ten years.

2007: 1523
2008: 2736
2009: 5771
2010: 4654
2011: 3579
2012: 4655
2013: 5496
2014: 5549
2015: 5322
2016: 4985

Covina's high proportion (76%) of violations by visitors could explain why the number of violations has plateaued at high levels. Because of Covina's high percentage (73%) of right turn violations, combined with that high percentage of visitors (who are unlikely to have their driving behavior improved by cameras they don't know are there), I would like to suggest that the council ask staff to identify the specific intersections where the danger from rolling right turns remains high and consider installing "blank out" signs programmed to light up and prohibit all right turns during the riskiest portions of the signal cycle. The City should not stand by and allow the running to continue unimpeded.

I would also like to suggest that before you consider the proposed five-year extension, you ask your staff to do a report similar to the one San Francisco did but with a focus on accidents arising from rolling right turns. And publish the report a couple weeks ahead of time, so that the public has an appropriate amount of time to review the report and comment on it.

Sincerely,

(highwayrobbery.net)

Attached below: My 2016 letter to the City Council

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject: Covina council meeting of Mar 1 - red light cams - 2 more years?

Date: Sun, 28 Feb 2016 15:26:25 -0800

From: (highwayrobbery.net)

Reply-To:

To: mayer@covinaca.gov, jking@covinaca.gov, kstapleton@covinaca.gov,
wallen@covinaca.gov, jmarquez@covinaca.gov, cityclerk@covinaca.gov

To City staff: Please distribute this email and its attachments to the members of the city council, and to the public.

2-28-16

Venue: Covina council meeting of Mar. 1, item NB1, red light camera contract

Honorable Councilmembers:

The staff report is suggestive that all the credit for the claimed reduction in accidents should go to the red light cameras; it doesn't mention the many other influences acting over the years, such as:

1. Changes in traffic volume due to the 2008 recession and recovery,
2. Now most cars have anti-lock brakes and side-curtain air bags - which may be much of the reason for the statewide 20% reduction in injury accidents over the last decade,
3. More effective identification and arrest of DUI drivers and repeat offenders, and the greater availability of alternate ways to get home, like Uber and Lyft.
4. Improvements Covina engineering staff has made at the intersections, such as better lighting, signage, pavement markings, and signal timing. Staff at the San Francisco MTA recently did a study (copy attached) showing a strong time correlation between engineering improvements they made and a reduction in accidents at their camera enforced intersections, but little or no correlation between the installation dates of the cameras and the reduction in accidents.

Finally, because 72% of the City's camera tickets are for right turns, please consider this statement found in a Dec. 26, 2014 Wall Street Journal interview of an red light camera industry leader: "Mr. [James] Saunders [then-president of RedFlex] suggests jurisdictions refrain from issuing a [rolling right] ticket except when a pedestrian is in the crosswalk." The headline was, "Can the Red-Light Camera Be Saved? - Money-hungry politicians discredit a hopeful safety innovation." (A Jan. 22, 2015 column in the Dallas Morning News confirmed the statement The Journal had attributed to Saunders: "When I asked Redflex spokeswoman Jody Ryan about her boss' comments urging cities to lighten up on rolling reds, she answered, "It only makes sense that Jim is going to say, 'Look, we need people to be thoughtful about how they are implementing these programs and how they are issuing citations.' It wasn't that shocking.") I suggest that since the number of right turn violations has remained high despite years of photo enforcement (the 7% recidivism by Covina residents is the highest I have seen anywhere), the City should study its records to determine *when* during the red phase the most dangerous of those violations are occurring and then install "blank out" signs programmed to light up and prohibit right turns during the high risk portion of the phase.

Regards,

(highwayrobbery.net)