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Council votes to delay decision on red-light camera contract

by [Tawny McCray](#) December 19, 2019 1161

ENCINITAS — Encinitas is one of only three places left in the county that still use red-light cameras as a means of cutting down on red-light runners and traffic collisions and the city council's support for the program seems to be waning.

At last week's council meeting, the council, instead of voting on whether to extend the city's current 18-month contract with camera company Redflex, unanimously agreed to direct the city's traffic engineer, Abraham Bandegan to look into whether the company, which it's employed for the service for the past 15 years, remains the best choice to use. Council also directed staff to look into other camera providers the city could potentially use and whether there were alternatives other than the cameras that could reduce the incidence of motorists running red lights.

"I'm a bit suspicious of the program," Councilman Joe Mosca said. "Are there structural things that we can do to adjust these intersections that will make it less likely that people are going to be running red lights?"

Red light cameras were installed in Encinitas in 2004 at El Camino Real and Encinitas Boulevard. More than a year later, another system was put in at the intersection where El Camino Real, Leucadia Boulevard and Olivenhain Road meet.

According to a city report, during the past five years, 81% of the violations were issued to non-residents and 19% were issued to Encinitas residents. Additionally, 99% of the notices were issued to first-time violators and only 1% had multiple violations on their records.

The report states that the lack of repeat violators may be considered a measure of the program's effectiveness, meaning after being detected by the system and receiving their first notice, most have not repeated the violation at these locations.

The last time this issue was debated at council was in August 2018. Bandegan said at that time council directed staff to compare the red-light intersections to similar intersections that don't have cameras. He said they chose El Camino Real and La Costa, and El Camino Real and Palomar Airport Road.

Bandegan said the data “doesn’t clearly show that these intersections under camera are way safer than others without camera.”

Along with Encinitas, Del Mar and Solana Beach still utilize their red-light cameras. Cities that have terminated their red-light camera programs include Oceanside, Vista, Escondido, Poway, El Cajon and San Diego.

Three members of the public spoke on the cameras at the meeting, two opposed to keeping them and one in favor of them staying put.

Peter Kohl, chairman of the city’s Traffic and Public Safety Commission, who said he was speaking not as a commissioner but as an individual, said he has been in favor of the cameras since the beginning and has not changed his mind.

“The cameras are the most effective way to discourage red-light running,” he said. “Enforcement is the best way to get people to comply with any law.”

Cardiff resident George Hejduk said he’s spent 15 years “fighting this fiasco” and wants to see the cameras — and their associated hefty ticket fines — done away with.

“Encinitas is one of the three remaining cities in this county continuing to operate the outrageous public price gauging \$490 plus a ticket — red light camera theft,” Hejduk said. “You should rid us of this partnership that you have entered with the Redflex company when almost every other city in this county has found some reason to eliminate these dreadful cameras.”

Mayor Catherine Blakespear said she also had concerns about the high cost of the tickets, arguing that she doesn’t support the camera program partly because it’s “fundamentally unfair to the poor.”

“To me there’s a real proportionality problem with sending someone a \$500 ticket for rolling through a red light in the middle of the night on a right-hand turn,” Blakespear said.

The mayor pointed out that the program is costing the city \$200,000 a year, and they’re making about that, or slightly more than that, a year from it, which “doesn’t seem to me like it’s a net positive.”

She added that leaving the cameras in Encinitas when many other cities have removed theirs sends a message to the mostly out-of-towner offenders that the city is an “unfriendly” place.

Both Deputy Mayor Jody Hubbard and Councilwoman Kellie Shay Hinze said they have concerns with the program, but say they would support it due to the fact that the majority of the Traffic and Public Safety Commission recently backed it.

Councilman Tony Kranz said he was in support of the red-light camera program, saying “it’s an important part of our public safety” program. Kranz said having the cameras are as good as having a traffic officer doing the same job.

“I get that the fine is expensive, but the reality is that it’s the same amount, whether a human issues the ticket or the camera (does),” Kranz said.

The city’s current contract with Redflex expires in May.

[Tawny McCray](#)

Tawny McCray is a native San Diegan and graduate of San Diego State University. She has known she wanted to be a journalist since writing for her Jr. High School newspaper in 1991. She has worked at The Star News in Chula Vista, The San Diego Union Tribune and ABC 10News San Diego. She has recently freelanced for Scripps Ranch News and The Poway Eagle and is a longtime freelancer with [creators.com](#). She is working on authoring books with her twin sister, Nyla. She and her husband have two kids and live in South Park.

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[john](#) December 19, 2019 at 5:51 pm

Such B.S. I see so many red light runners in Encinitas and no cops to enforce the law (and my family’s safety). Blow the light, get a ticket, pay the fine! What is the problems people? Encinitas has become LA and entitled drivers central! Support red light cameras. The crash you prevent may be your own!

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