

KEVIN VALINE SEPTEMBER 11, 2014

Modesto News: Don't fear the red light cameras

HIGHLIGHTS

Drivers who run a red light at a Modesto intersection equipped with red-light cameras don't have to worry about getting a citation in the mail.

BY KEVIN VALINE - KVALINE@MODBEE.COM

Drivers who run a red light at a Modesto intersection equipped with red-light cameras don't have to worry about getting a citation in the mail.

Though the news just came to light, the Police Department suspended the program for six months starting in mid-May. Officials were reluctant to publicize the decision because of the high number of major traffic incidents throughout the city and their hope the cameras would continue to serve as a deterrent.

Police Chief Galen Carroll said his department primarily suspended the program because it does not have the staffing to review the pictures to determine whether a citation can be issued. Carroll said a reserve officer, who is retired, had been reviewing the pictures. But because of state changes to the pension rules, that retired officer was required to take six months off before going back to work.

Carroll said because his department is at its lowest staffing in more than 20 years, he did not assign another officer to the job.

Modesto contracted with RedFlex Traffic Systems in 2004 to provide the red-light cameras at major intersections for five years. The city extended the contract for seven years in 2009. Carroll estimates the city has cameras at a half-dozen intersections.

Modesto pays RedFlex through the revenue it gets from the red-light citations. Carroll said Modesto gets enough revenue to pay RedFlex but is concerned about paying more than what other cities pay for the cameras. He said that will be addressed if the city reinstates the cameras after the six months.

Information on what – if anything – it would cost Modesto to end its contract with RedFlex was not available.

Officials believe the cameras make intersections safer, but critics question whether the cameras change driving habits. There also are concerns about how much drivers pay. The Bee reported in October that the tickets with court fees are \$500.

In other traffic news, the city's proposal to put College Avenue on a "road diet" was endorsed this week by the City Council's Safety & Communities Committee. The proposal will be presented to the full council for consideration, but a date has not been set.

A road diet is a traffic-calming technique that slows and improves the flow of traffic and makes streets safer for pedestrians and bicyclists.

City officials are considering putting four-lane College Avenue from Needham Street to Briggsmore Avenue on the diet, which consists of restriping the road to create one traffic lane in each direction, a center left-turn lane, bike lanes, and more room between parked cars and traffic. Officials will have to work out all of the kinks – such as how the road diet would affect traffic on College Avenue's side streets – before bringing it to the council.



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