

Garden Grove Might Nix Red Light Cameras



A warning sign for a red light camera system. Garden Grove officials are considering banning them. (Photp credit: unknown)

By Thy Vo June 23, 2015 at 6:20 AM

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Garden Grove, one of just two Orange County cities that still use red light traffic cameras, could nix its contract with a red light enforcement company after the city council requested a review of the program at a recent meeting.

Red light cameras have gone out of vogue in the past few years, with an increasing number of cities across the state ending their contracts with traffic companies or banning the technology altogether.

Last March, Santa Ana City Council members voted to end the city's use of red light cameras, although cameras will stay up until the end of June (<http://voiceofoc.org/2014/03/santa-ana-city-council-votes-to-end-red-light-camera-contract/>) when their contract expires.

In December, the county Board of Supervisors also voted to ban the them from unincorporated parts of the county.

Now it looks like Garden Grove could follow suit. Mayor Bao Nguyen requested an evaluation of the program that would show whether the cameras have actually reduced the number of collisions and accidents at the intersections where they are posted.

Advocates of red light enforcement systems say the cameras reduce traffic accidents

by incentivizing drivers to be more cautious and reducing collisions caused by drivers running red lights.

According to the [Federal Highway Administration \(http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/redlight/cameras/qas.cfm#q3\)](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/redlight/cameras/qas.cfm#q3), red light cameras are shown to decrease crashes at a right-angle by 25 percent, but can increase rear-end collisions caused by drivers slamming on the brakes by 15 percent.

In general, collisions at a right angle are more likely to be fatal or result in injury.

Garden Grove has contracted with the firm Redflex Traffic Systems Inc. since 2007 to provide cameras at ten intersections. The current contract is set to automatically renew at the end of June.

Although the city has yet to compile collision statistics, anecdotally, officials say they have seen collisions decrease at red light camera intersections. The city typically receives one fifth of the revenue from each red light camera citation.

"It's a not-for-profit venture. We did not install cameras with the intent of drawing in revenue, but the intent of reducing accidents," Roeder said.

Still, while officials say a reduction in citations should be reflected in a decrease in city revenues, annual revenues have gone up and down since the cameras were installed in 2007.

Revenues rose in the first three years of the program's implementation, from \$774,000 during the 2007-08 fiscal year to a peak of \$924,000 in 2009-10.

In 2011-12, revenue took a nose dive to \$510,000, and has since increased to an average of \$750,000 in annual revenue each year.

Once the largest red light enforcement company in the nation, Redflex has since come under national scrutiny after an

exposed that the company paid \$2 million in bribes to a politically connected former Chicago city official named John Bills.

The company, which is based out of Phoenix, Arizona, is currently under investigation by the federal authorities in a number of states.

The company's former CEO Karen Finley, who led the company from 2005 to 2013, pleaded guilty last week to participating in a scheme in which a consultant for the company made campaign contributions to elected officials in Columbus and Cincinnati, Ohio,

The city can cancel the agreement with a 30-day written notice, Roeder said.

James Dean Jones, who works for a Westminster-based company that helps drivers get traffic tickets dismissed, told the city council that the cameras "show no positive impact and is causing financial hardship."

Dean claims that the majority of clients who received red light camera tickets are

drivers who slow down at a red light but don't stop completely before making a right turn.

"These violations occur at three miles an hour," Dean said. "These are people who come up to the corner, see it's safe and take a turn."

He also felt the cost of a red light ticket is unfair and onerous.

"A ticket for rolling through a stop sign is \$238. If you run a red light camera, it's \$490 bucks," Dean said. "[Red light cameras] line the pocket of an out-of-state company that has no community benefit whatsoever."

Councilman Phat Bui, who lives at the busy intersection of Trask Ave. and Brookhurst St., said the cameras make him and his wife nervous.

"It causes a lot of stomach burn for us, because we're always worried that [the camera] is shining and we will get a ticket," Bui said.

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