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Watchdog

Watchdog: Red flags fly on red-light cameras

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Dave Lieber

Watchdog

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I nearly fell out of my chair reading a recent interview with the head of the red-light camera company that provides the flashing contraptions to cities such as Allen, Coppell, Denton, Grand Prairie, Mesquite, Plano, Richardson and University Park.

In a column by Holman W. Jenkins Jr. of *The Wall Street Journal*, here's the paragraph that stunned me:

"As for a universal peeve of motorists, being fined for a harmless rolling right on red, Mr. [Jim] Saunders suggests jurisdictions refrain from issuing a ticket except when a pedestrian is in the crosswalk."

I read that again. The head of Redflex Traffic Systems is urging the hundreds of cities that use his red-light cameras to lighten up on the easiest way these cities make their money: rolling right on red, creeping around the corner when no people or cars are in sight, triggering a white flash of light that costs a \$75 civil fine.

I didn't realize the red-light traffic camera industry was in such trouble that the head of one of the dominant companies is urging its customers to be nice. Nice was never part of the red-light camera industry.

Less than a decade ago, these companies stormed through towns and cities across Texas and America promising safety and money, but not necessarily in that order.

It hasn't been an overwhelming success. This week, residents of Arlington delivered to City Hall enough signatures, they believe, to place on the May 9 ballot a measure outlawing the cameras within city limits.

The Arlington City Council previously failed to act on a request by Councilman Robert Rivera to ban cameras in Arlington. The cameras, installed by Redflex competitor American Traffic Solutions, have brought in \$12 million to Arlington, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* reported.

Cameras are banned in Houston, Lubbock and College Station. Ten states also ban them.

A state representative from Bedford also has introduced a bill to ban the cameras throughout Texas.

When I asked Redflex spokeswoman Jody Ryan about her boss's 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."

But I bet it is to people who get these tickets every day. In Denton last year, the *Denton Record-Chronicle* reports, 15 cameras captured more than 35,000 violations, most of them rolling reds. That's 95 drivers a day who didn't get the nice treatment now urged by CEO of the company that gave Denton its cameras.

The rest of Jenkins' column — called "Can the Red-Light Camera Be Saved?" — is filled with more news about a company trying to reinvent itself with new products, some of them nice. Most important, the company promises it won't engage in corrupt practices anymore.

A previous CEO of Redflex was indicted by federal prosecutors as part of a bribery scheme to get business in the city of — where else? — Chicago. One participant in the alleged scheme — the bagman who delivered money and favors to his city hall contact — has

already pleaded guilty.

A former executive of the company has told prosecutors that officials in 13 other states, including Texas, accepted money and gifts for help with the contracts.

The U.S. office of the Australian-owned company is losing money, so the company is coming to market with new products, including an app that alerts motorists where the cameras are situated. The company's board also is considering diving deeper into the traffic management business and also collecting electronic tolls.

Both lovers and haters of the cameras can point to studies supporting their positions.

The city of Dallas, locked in a contract with Xerox to run its cameras, bragged last year that "there has been a reduction in red light crashes and a reduction in red light related injuries at all camera approaches."

City Council member Philip Kingston challenges the quality of the study and says the cameras should go away. He hasn't received the same kind of backup Arlington council member Rivera has received with a petition drive to get on the ballot.

Dallas City Hall has an interest in keeping the cameras with the same company and not seeking bids for a better deal. As it stands, Dallas drivers who are ticketed and don't pay get reported to credit bureaus. If Dallas changes its contract, under law, the city couldn't report to bureaus any longer. Without that threat, more people probably wouldn't pay the fines.

After Houston banned the cameras, the Police Department reported that auto crashes more than doubled at Houston intersections where the cameras were pulled, the *Houston Chronicle* reports.

But researchers at Texas A&M University's Transportation Institute, reports Christian McPhate in the *Denton Record-Chronicle*, analyzed data from 32 Texas cities two years ago and found that rear-end collisions had actually increased 37 percent at intersections with red-light cameras watching.

My gripe is about the unfairness. The process isn't standardized. In Dallas, for instance, if you have outstanding camera tickets, you can't register your car. In Fort Worth or Arlington, that doesn't happen because the county tax assessor-collector doesn't help Tarrant County cities by collecting delinquent fines.

Coming Sunday: A local car repair shop in turmoil.

Staff writer Marina Trahan Martinez contributed to this report.

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Cherie

149 days ago

I have about 6 outstanding at the corner of Nw Hwy and Marsh/Lemmon, by the Walgreens. Each one was a right hand turn in the middle of the night with no traffic. I tried to dispute, but was told I have to come to a complete stop. Who in the world stops completely to turn right at 3 am with no traffic? WHO!? Its wrecked my credit bc I cannot pay, and I'm sure I'll get more before I move from this side of town. :-/

Reply Share 1 reply

1 1



Jason

72 days ago

Sounds like DART would be a good option for you.

Reply Share

0 1



Andy Shane

150 days ago

As an airline pilot, I have the same beef with the FAA. I mean, it impinges on my personal freedom when radar catches me traveling faster than 250 knots below 10,000 feet, or when the black box in my plane tells the company I've waited too long to extend flaps or gear or have failed to achieve a stabilized approach in time for landing. I mean, isn't it my right to have fun and push the limits once in awhile? In a car, it's the same thing; after all, as a taxpayer I OWN the roads and no one is endangered by the way I drive; so, why do I have to be held accountable?

Reply Share 2 replies

1 1



Jason

72 days ago

Laws and rules are just there as a general guide. No one should tell me what I can and can't do. If I want to drive 100 mph through a school zone, I should be able to do that whenever a police officer isn't present because it's my right.

Reply Share

0 0



Anonymous

38 days ago

Take that 737 and fly it like a F-35 with 170 passengers in back! Yeah, I like it. don't forget to do a few barrel rolls and tight turns while you are at it. I want to be one of those passengers! I mean hey, we pay for transportation, but why not have some fun while we are at it?

Reply Share

0 0



Karl Jay

151 days ago

I got hit with one of these rolling red light violations in Richardson...corner of Coit and Campbell. The video showed I slowly rolled through the red...even though I had stopped prior to the camera's field of view. That didn't count. Anyway, I went back to that intersection later, and in three minutes noted 22 violations. Most never even slowed down...I wonder if they all got tickets as well. It got me thinking about "Equal Protection" and if it is legal for non-police officers/non-officers of the court to issue tickets. These tickets are issued by the vendor...

Reply Share

1 0



bigTex

152 days ago

The reality is that most people just don't like to be policed.

Reply Share

3 1



bigTex

152 days ago

I've received a few of these and reviewed the video and each time it was legit. I was in the wrong (even if slightly). But without them(the cameras) people literally just keep turning left on red no matter what color the light is. It's amazing really to just sit and watch.

Reply Share

3 1



Anonymous

152 days ago

I need a video of everytime the city leaves my damn trashcan in the middle of the street.

Reply Share 1 reply

0 0



Larri

55 days ago

So, go BUY A CAMERA!

Reply Share

0 0



Henry Smith

152 days ago

The Red Light Camera also 'conveniently' circumvents State Law limiting a city's revenue from traffic citations (classic speed traps). VERY important for smaller cities.

Didn't see that in the article either.

..

Reply Share 3 0



Henry 152 days ago

If you stick close to home you're at little risk from red light cameras; you know where the cameras are in your neighborhood, and in Texas the fine is relatively low. Just don't travel to California! California is the future. Most programs focus on rolling right turn tickets, the fine is \$500.00 to \$600.00 and still growing - and the ideal target is visitors from out of town or out of state.

If you must go to California:

If you are flying in or out of SFO, do not drive on nearby Millbrae Avenue between El Camino, the BART station, and the 101, or on the offramp from the southbound 101, because in October and November the City of Millbrae issued 2397 red light camera tickets in that half mile stretch, nearly all for rolling right turns. If you have friends who will be going thru SFO, or renting a car there, warn them about the Millbrae trap.

Down South, the Beverly Hills council just voted to expand their already-punishing camera system by 2/3.

Neighboring Culver City is adding more right turn enforcement to their system.

If you plan to visit California, be prepared. Do a search on snitch ticket and another search on red light camera no consequence. Because just one of California's \$500.00 camera tickets can ruin your whole day.

To see actual official figures showing the proportion of right turn tickets in California,city by city, do a search on: Redflex "judicial counsel"

Reply Delete Share 3 replies 0 1



Henry Smith 152 days ago

Close to home comment is not valid.

Cities in North Texas constantly move the cameras around to different intersections. Once the cabling and mounts are in place, they can move a camera system from one intersection to another easily within an hour (If break time is excluded).

Yes..they do post "warning" signs for the camera.

How sweet! I find it necessary to keep my eyes on the road and my adversaries around me and not be gawking at billboards and other insignificant signs like "We buy houses" and "Red Light Camera Trap ahead"..

..

Reply Share 2 0



Wallace Freeman 151 days ago

I suspect California would experience great difficulty collecting on their revenue requests from vehicles not registered in that state. Here in Texas its just a matter of registering the vehicle in a county where the tax collector refuses to play the \$cam.

Reply Share 1 0



Jason 72 days ago

Or you could just stop at the intersections before turning.

Reply Share 0 0



Stephen Donaldson 152 days ago

Be wary of "trusting" this report without INDEPENDENTLY USING THE SAME CRITERAL BEFORE AND AFTER. LIKE THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE DID.

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/watchdog/redlight/ct-red-light-camera-safety-met-20141219-story.html#page=1>

"The state-of-the-art study commissioned by the Tribune concluded the cameras do not reduce injury-related crashes overall — undercutting Mayor Rahm Emanuel's primary defense of a program beset by mismanagement, malfunction and a \$2 million bribery scandal."

It is well known that many "safety" claims of RLC fail to stand up to the light when further investigated too.

- www.motorists.org
- Ban the Cams on Facebook
- Camerafraud on Facebook

Reply Share 2 0



Stephen Donaldson 152 days ago

I would be wary of using Houston this was the same POLICE DEPARTMENT WHO was behind the RLC in the first place.

What did they use ATS "collaborated" data in the RLC period compared to difference crash criteria????

Wouldn't be the first time either.

Make no mistake some police are way too close to the industry. Like this Houston Police officer who was a

PAID LOBBYIST for ATS. <http://blog.chron.com/houstonpolitics/2011/07/police-union-director-also-a-red-light-camera-lobbyist/>

There have been too many episodes of shennigans from the RLC side to "trust" many claims.

Heck Houston even attempted to hide a RLC report HIDDEN in the past. <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/33/3310.asp>

Than we have ATS RIGGING "violation" data on Murrieta CA. <http://www.thenewspaper.com/news/40/4078.asp>

"It is only through blatant deception that ATS is able to come up with their fraudulent 86.9 percent increase," Beeber said. "Make no mistake, this is not some accounting error on the part of ATS. It is obviously a deliberate attempt to deceive and we need to let the press know exactly what ATS is doing or they will take their bogus numbers and print the story without any fact checking."

Makes one wonder if ATS had pulled the same stunt in Houston years back too?

Than we have POLICE in another ATS town using shorter distances to hide crash data. <http://www.wtsp.com/story/news/investigations/2014/03/19/tampa-red-light-camera-crash-stats-deceiving/6618875/>

Quote: In fact, accidents between 25 and 50 feet from the intersection – where many rear-end collisions would likely take place – jumped by 68 percent. Public records led 10 Investigates to numerous accident victims and rear-end collisions that were never counted in the city's selected crash stats.

But TPD never released all of its data, instead distributing just the 25-foot statistics to local media outlets and city leadership."

WHO "helped" the police do the report???

1. How many crashes were RLR
2. What distance was used
3. What dollar amount was used.

Reply Share 2 0



James Jones 152 days ago

"He hasn't received the same kind of backup Arlington council member Rivera has received with a petition drive to get on the ballot." Of course not. Dallas is much larger, and therefore much more corrupt than Arlington. Both are bad, but Dallas is more likely to succeed in keeping those illegal bags of money flowing in.

Reply Share 1 reply 3 1



Larri 55 days ago

You've said your drivel and you can get back to your 7th-grade class, now.

Reply Share 1 0



Tron Smart 152 days ago

If it was about safety these would have been outlawed soon after inception. It is about money. Find the busiest intersections with the most violators and watch the cash pile up. What is truly amazing about these devices, especially in Texas is the sheer number of violations that are committed by illegals, unregistered vehicles or people in the act of a crime that never get pursued. For some reason, they always seem to pursue those that are able pay the ticket and forgive the violators that might cost the city to pursue.

Reply Share 2 0



Scott Miller 152 days ago

"95 drivers a day who didn't get the nice treatment" --- So your argument is that since some people have already been convicted of a crime then the relevant law should not be reconsidered? By that logic we would still be under Prohibition!

Reply Share 2 0



Henry Smith 152 days ago

Surprised you didn't mention the cities shortening the amber light to enhance revenue. Even if you don't want to run the red ; they will make sure you do.

Until they do away with tail-gating, I will run the red light when necessary to avoid being rear-ended.

Reply Share 5 replies 8 8



petenelson277 152 days ago

Will you please look for oncoming traffic, before you run that red light? It might be me coming down that road. And I will have the right of way.

In my city, they are trying out new lights. The Amber light will flash/delay for a period of time, before changing to red.
A yield moment.
It seems to be working well.

Reply Share 5 1

Texas_Vinyl 152 days ago



Henry makes a good point. The only time I got hit by one of these red light machines was at an intersection (Greenville @ Mockingbird) that has a long, swinging left turn protected by a green arrow. There is always a long line of cars waiting multiple light cycles to turn left.

The green arrow lasts long enough for maybe 2-3 cars to enter the intersection, and the yellow light is "extremely" short.

It is no surprise that this camera brings in a lot of revenue.

Reply Share 3 0



Scott Miller 152 days ago

The proper (and legal) response to tailgating is to slow down and give yourself more time to gradually come to a stop. It also often encourages the tailgater to pass you, solving the problem.

Reply Share 1 reply 1 2



Henry Smith 152 days ago

CORRECT !!!!

Good Luck with that!

After receiving one of these from Bubba in a tiny town trap; I learned to floor the pedal on amber when there is not time or distance (or tailgaters) to possibly make a safe stop and hope I can make it through before the big red lights up. Certainly not a safe way to drive but a lot less expensive!

..

Reply Share 2 0



Larri 55 days ago

Until you KILL someone, you blithering idiot.

Reply Share 1 0



petenelson277 152 days ago

Rear end collisions increased.
Yes, not surprising.
Due to riding the bumper of the car in front of you.
So he follows the law and stops, and you do not...result... rear end collision.

Reply Share 8 2



Eric Foster 152 days ago

Red Light Cameras are this decade's Radar Detectors.
Anything that catches rich white people breaking the law gets criticized. Red Light Cameras catch everybody, not just THEM.

Reply Share 2 4



Ralph Weinberg 152 days ago

Why shouldn't people pay a fine for blowing through a red light?

So where is the study examining the circumstances of violations? How many are people blowing through the light? How many are people slowing for a right turn legally but the light changes a fraction of a second before they enter the intersection?

Reply Share 1 reply 3 1



Larri 55 days ago

TOO many. The cameras should be installed at EVERY intersection. If you OBEY THE LAW, you won't have a problem.

Reply Share 1 0



Henry 152 days ago

There are no doubt problems with the "rolling red" turns; however, one can sit at virtually any intersection light in Dallas for five minutes and see at least two cars running straight through a red light. It is dangerous to be the first car to enter an intersection when a light turns green. I have witnessed the crashes myself.

Reply Share 9 0

tadbanyon 152 days ago

I totally agree about the camera and the rolling red light, but its not only the camera. I got a ticket from an officer for coming to a near-complete-stop at a red light, turning right, with no one coming my direction for as far as the

eye can see. Absurd.

Reply Share 2 replies 2 5



Tracey Edwards 152 days ago

Well if you had come to an actual complete stop you would not have received a ticket. That is why it is called a stop light, not yield light.

Reply Share 1 reply 5 2



Larri 55 days ago

BRAVO!

Reply Share 1 0



whartonWiser 152 days ago

City of Arlington sent me one that claimed a p/u truck w/my license number ran a Red Light. It didn't happen. I was on that street one time and did turn right on Red but within the law. Now, they claim I won't be able to register my car or renew my license. There isn't much sympathy when the cash cow is threatened.

Reply Share 2 replies 5 1

This comment has been deleted

2 replies



Henry Smith 152 days ago

'Right' or safety are not the issues here. See other comments!!

This is just another hidden tax.

..

Reply Share 1 reply 2 1



Larri 55 days ago

YOU are just another hidden fool.

Reply Share 1 0