

KEVIN VALINE MAY 7, 2015

Modesto looks to turn red-light cameras back on



Modesto News

Issues affecting the city, the economy and quality of life

BY KEVIN VALINE
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Drivers running red lights at some of Modesto's major intersections may soon want to say "Cheese!"

The city is considering turning its red-light cameras back on after turning them off a year ago as the city and camera company negotiated a new contract at a lower cost to the city.

Police Chief Galen Carroll said a lack of staffing has been the prime reason for keeping the cameras dark so long. The police review the video from the cameras to determine whether to issue citations. Carroll said he has solved the staffing issue. But Modesto also is concerned about paying more for its cameras than other cities are paying.

Carroll expects the new contract will come before the City Council in several weeks. He said there is no cost to the city if the council decides not to approve the agreement and to end the program. Modesto has had the cameras at four major intersections for about a decade after entering into a contract with Arizona-based Redflex Traffic Systems in 2004. The initial contract was renewed in 2009.

Details of the new contract were not available.

Carroll said the cameras provide 24/7 coverage, are less expensive than using officers and make the intersections safer, though some experts question that last point. Many California cities have turned their cameras off in recent years.

Redflex has faced controversy and litigation in some of the communities that have used its cameras.

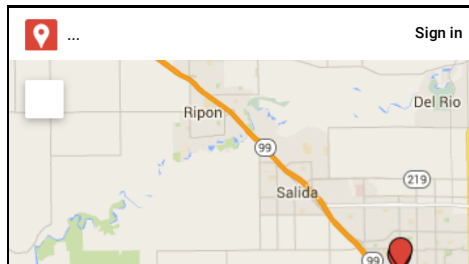
For instance, The Sacramento Bee reported in

September that Redflex provided free meals to Sacramento County sheriff's deputies and California Highway Patrol officers involved in the county's selection of a red-light camera contract worth as much as \$11.8 million. Redflex beat out several competitors when the county awarded it the contract. Sacramento County Sheriff Scott Jones said the free meals had no bearing on the decision.

The cameras are not popular with many drivers. The Modesto Bee reported in October 2013 that the tickets cost \$500. Drivers may be more upset if the cameras are turned back on because the new contract calls for more coverage of an intersection.

Carroll said before the cameras were turned off, they had been monitoring drivers making left and right turns. The cameras did not monitor drivers going through the intersection after the light had turned red. But Carroll said under the new contract, the cameras will catch those drivers.

Carroll – who has been in Modesto a little more than two years – said he was surprised to learn the cameras did not provide full coverage and suspects it was set up this way to save Modesto money.



The cameras are at Briggsmore Avenue and Sisk Road; Briggsmore and Prescott Road; Briggsmore and Oakdale Road; and Coffee Road and Sylvan Avenue.

Here's more on the money.

The cameras are supposed to be “revenue neutral,” with the city collecting enough money from its share of the red-light tickets to pay Redflex. Police officials say this is the case but can't say so definitively.

The Stanislaus Superior Court collects the payments from all of the traffic tickets Modesto issues and sends the city its share. But the court cannot provide the city with a breakdown showing how much revenue comes just from the red-light tickets.

Police officials analyzed the red-light cameras' costs in 2013 and estimated the ticket revenue exceeded the Redflex payments.

For instance in 2012, Modesto paid \$273,721 to Redflex and for the cameras' utilities and estimated it received \$318,217 in ticket revenue. It also paid \$24,000 for a reserve officer to review the camera video.

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Interesting article, not one mention of the life-altering injuries and life-ending injuries caused by people who run red lights. The instances of people running red lights in Modesto

