

Sign In | Register | Newsletters
eEdition / Subscriber Services | Mobile | Mobile Alerts

Like 32k

Site Web Search by YAHOO!

today's DEALS NOB HILL FOODS

Share Tweet 0

BOOKMARK Print Email Font Resize

Ticket revenue factored heavily in Oakland red light cameras

By Matthew Artz Oakland Tribune

Posted: 10/07/2012 12:00:00 AM PDT
Updated: 10/07/2012 06:22:04 AM PDT

OAKLAND -- Red light cameras were supposed to be a double blessing for Oakland, improving safety and generating much needed revenue. But when an additional safety measure sharply reduced violations and corresponding camera ticket income, the city reversed it.

Sure enough, red light running violations at Oakland's 11 camera enforced intersections quickly rebounded.

Now as the City Council this month considers extending the camera program for three more years and possibly expanding it, opponents have seized on the episode to argue that the cameras' alluring profit potential actually make them a threat to traffic safety.

"The city knew they could reduce red light running and instead they decided to increase it to make money," said Jay Beeber a camera opponent and founder of Safer Streets LA.

City officials countered that cameras have decreased collisions, helped collect crime scene evidence and generated more than \$1.1 million since they were installed four years ago.

And police rejected any claims that they put money ahead of safety.

"The purpose of red light cameras is to reduce accidents," Chief Howard Jordan said. "We don't do things like that to generate more revenue for the city."

Police pressure

The sudden drop in camera tickets occurred two years ago after traffic engineers, without telling police, added one second to yellow light times at nearly every camera-enforced

intersection -- from four seconds to five seconds.

The longer yellow was supposed to make the intersections safer and protect the city from drivers who might be tempted to file a class-action lawsuit over the tickets that now carry a \$480 price tag.

But it also coincided with a nearly 50 percent drop in red light violations caught on film.

Fewer violations meant fewer tickets, which worried police.

The department had told council members that the camera system would make money for the city, which currently receives \$167 per fully-paid citation.

Some of that ticket revenue goes directly into department coffers, and the city's contract with red light camera provider, Redflex Holdings Group, made it costly to abandon the program.

With red light running suddenly on the wane, the city risked losing money, and police began pressing city traffic engineers to restore the shorter yellow light times.

In separate emails, former Lt. Anthony Banks asked Wladimir Wlassowsky, the city's Transportation Services Division manager, if his department supported the red light camera program and queried what could be done to go back to the shorter yellow light times.

On Jan. 20, 2010, he wrote, "Any answer for this yet? As I stated before, this is affecting the program in a negative way."

In an April 2010 report to the City Council's Public Safety Committee, police said the longer yellow lights had resulted in about 40 fewer red light violations per day. Although one of the original goals of installing the cameras was to reduce red light running, police wrote that they were working with traffic engineers on "possible solutions" to the problem.

"Most cities are smart enough not to make it so blatant what there motivations are," Beeber said. "But in this case, it was pretty blatant."



fyi bayarea

Find:
in: East Bay Go

Great Specials! from Doors on Demand of Fremont

2 For 2 from Strictly To Go Pizza of Concord

Dining | Ads/coupons | Claim Your Listing

Most Viewed Most E-Mailed

(From the last 12 hours)



- California parole board OKs Manson follower's release
- Senators, survivors ask: Did Army's secret Cold War chemical tests...
- Hayward man killed, three others wounded in East Oakland shootings
- Drummond: What about killers who aren't cops?
- Oakland Raiders reflect on what made Al Davis unique
- Ticket revenue factored heavily in Oakland red light cameras

Recommendations

Sign Up

Create an account or log in to see what your friends are recommending.



Report: Monitor's findings shed poor light on Oakland's police department - Inside Bay Area

One person recommended this.



Fall color: Why California (yes, California) has the best autumn display in the nation - Inside Bay.

58 people recommend this.

Facebook social plugin

Top Classifieds

RENTALS JOBS REAL ESTATE AUTOS

Traffic engineers initially resisted police pressure. Ade Oluwasogo, Oakland's supervising transportation engineer, replied to Banks that the longer yellows were based on "the need to safely guard motorists through intersections" before the end of the phase when there are red lights in all directions.

But by late April the engineers agreed to return to the shorter yellows, which they said still were higher than state-required minimums and provided adequate safety for motorists.

Although red light running rose sharply at the camera-enforced intersections after yellow light times were shortened, Wlassowsky said the city hadn't put residents at risk. "I truly don't believe that there's any safety issue whatsoever," he said.

Impact of change

Oakland approved red light cameras in 2007 on the premise that they would generate more than \$2 million per year in ticket violations. Since then the city has paid Redflex just over \$3 million to install the cameras and operate them.

But the system quickly generated more problems than profits. The city spent far more than anticipated on installation costs and the department at times has been forced to use police officers working overtime to help review cases.

Traffic engineers initially added about a half second to yellow light times at most of the camera-enforced intersections to bring them up to state code.

The additional one-second increase in late December 2009 at nearly every camera-enforced intersection was implemented just as the system was finally generating significant numbers of tickets.

The impact was sudden and severe.

In December 2009, the cameras recorded 3,651 red light violations. In January, the number dropped to 1,936.

Traffic engineers restored the shorter yellow light times at camera-enforced intersections over several months, beginning in May and ending in early July. Red light camera violations steadily increased during that period with 2,874 violations in May, 3,172 violations in June and 3,340 violations in July. In August, the first full month of shorter yellow lights, the cameras recorded 3,873 red light violations.

The results were similar in Fremont, where Caltrans lengthened yellow light times by 0.7 seconds at one camera-enforced intersection in late 2010. Red light running violations consequently dropped from an average of 293 in the six months before the change to 151 in the six months afterward.

Offer Grembek, a researcher at UC Berkeley's Safe Transportation Research, said reasonably longer yellow light times have been shown to reduce red light running and should be used in conjunction with red light cameras.

"If you reduce red light running, you generally improve the intersection's safety," he said.

Grembek hadn't studied Oakland's intersection, but said the longer 5 second yellow intervals didn't seem excessive. "The concern is why did they go back," he said.

Safety debate

Oakland released statistics Thursday showing that red light collisions have dropped significantly at camera enforced intersections. The city recorded 25 red light-related collisions in 2009 when about half the cameras were installed. The number of collisions dropped to 13 in 2010 when the remaining cameras were installed and 11 the following year.

But a review of the highway patrol's collision database shows that one of the safest period for motorists at the camera-enforced intersections appears to have been those four months when the yellow light times were extended by an additional second.

There were only two accidents at impacted camera enforced intersections during that period in which red light running was cited as the primary cause. There were eight such collisions in the previous four months and six such collisions in the first four months after the intersections had reverted to the shorter yellow light time.

If Oakland extends its camera contract, it will be bucking a trend. Six Bay Area cities, including Emeryville and Union City, have recently scrapped their programs because they didn't generate enough revenue.

Oakland initially thought it was losing money on its system, but a recent review of records with the court system showed program revenues had been underreported and that it has generated over \$1 million and appears profitable going forward.

The Public Safety Committee will consider the proposed three-year contract extension at 5:30 p.m. Tuesday. If they support it, it will go to the full council for approval.

Contact Matthew Artz at 510-208-6435.

oakland's 11 camera-enforced intersections

66th Avenue and San Leandro Street

Jackson and 7th streets

MacArthur Boulevard and 82nd Avenue

Foothill Boulevard and High Street

High Street and Brookdale Avenue

27th and Northgate streets

Market and 36th streets

Market and 35th streets

Redwood Road and 35th Avenue

MacArthur Boulevard and Oakland Street

MacArthur Boulevard and Beaumont Street

SANTA CRUZ 3/2 HOME RENTAL \$3000
CUPERTINO HOME RENTAL 3/2 \$2550
Closing - Waiting List
CANYON 1BD \$1800 APT RENT
CUPERTINO 2/1...
FREMONT, 3BD/1BA Home Rental.
SANTA Teresa 3/2
El Sobrante 2bd

[All Listings](#)

BOOKMARK [Print](#) [Email](#) [Font Resize](#) [Return to Top](#)



RECOMMENDED FOR YOU

- ▶ SCarolina, Florida, WVU move into top 5 of AP...
- ▶ CHP searching for driver of SUV that struck...
- ▶ Tim Kawakami: San Francisco Giants blow golden...
- ▶ Fatal crash on I-680 in Pleasanton
- ▶ Mark Purdy: A's pitcher Pat Neshek takes memory...
- ▶ Paul Krugman: Romney's sick joke

-- SPONSORED LINK --

About 70 from Philly police helping out at Democratic convention (From DailyMe.com)



• FAQ: [Article commenting how-tos and tips](#)

Recommend

Sign Up to see what your friends recommend.

Related Results

Airport & Cruise Parking Free parking at airport & cruiseport with 1 nite discounted hotel stay

San Francisco 49ers Store Shop for San Francisco 49ers Gear. Official San Francisco 49ers Items.

San Francisco 49ers Shop Buy 2012 San Francisco 49ers Gear! Exclusive Gear only at NFLShop.com.

Ads by Yahoo

www.stay123.com

49ers.Fanatics.com

NFLShop.com/SanFrancisco49ers

Investing in digital marketing with no returns?



It's time you stop and ask for directions.

CLICK HERE for direction



[Privacy Policy](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [MNG Corporate Site Map](#) | [Copyright](#)

A MediaNews Group WEBSITE

**Ticket revenue
factored heavily
in Oakland red
light cameras**

*By Matthew Artz Oakland
Tribune Contra Costa*

Times

Posted:

[InsideBayArea.com](http://www.insidebayarea.com)

OAKLAND -- Red light cameras were supposed to be a double blessing for Oakland, improving safety and generating much needed revenue. But when an additional safety measure sharply reduced violations and corresponding camera ticket income, the city reversed it.

Sure enough, red light running violations at Oakland's 11 camera enforced intersections quickly rebounded.

Now as the City Council this month considers extending the camera program for three more years and possibly expanding it, opponents have seized on the episode to argue that the cameras' alluring profit potential actually make them a threat to traffic safety.

"The city knew they could reduce red light running and instead they decided to increase it to make money," said Jay Beeber a camera opponent and founder of Safer Streets L.A.

City officials countered that cameras have decreased collisions, helped collect crime scene evidence and generated more than \$1.1 million since they were installed