

----- Forwarded Message -----

Subject:Red light cam 2 year extension on May 7 agenda - San Mateo - my letter to council
Date:Mon, 7 May 2018 01:38:31 -0700
From:editor <editor@highwayrobbery.net>
Reply-To:editor@highwayrobbery.net
To:editor@highwayrobbery.net

FYI

Subject:Red light cam 2 year extension on May 7 agenda - San Mateo - my letter to council
Date:Mon, 7 May 2018 01:12:44 -0700
From:Jim
Reply-To:jim
To:mrfreschet@cityofsanmateo.org, igoethals@cityofsanmateo.org, citymanager@cityofsanmateo.org, rbonilla@cityofsanmateo.org, dpapan@cityofsanmateo.org, erodriguez@cityofsanmateo.org

5-6-18

Subject: Red light cam two year extension on May 7 agenda - San Mateo - my letter to council

Honorable Councilmembers:

The very brief staff report contains no safety stats. If the plan is to present the stats as a PowerPoint, or even verbally, during the meeting, I am concerned that doing so would have the effect of defeating any in-depth analysis by the public. Don't you want input from the public? (I suggest that the stats should be done by a professional with credentials in the field of statistics, one who is free of other lies or contracts with the City. And I hope that the stats will disclose, on a year-by-year basis, the percentage of tickets that are for rolling rights.)

I am attaching an example of a report having a very readable format; it was produced by the City of San Francisco.

I am also attaching a report Safer Streets LA (Jay Beeber) submitted to you in 2016.

Regarding price, the present staff report does reveal that staff has not managed to get any kind of discount. As I have pointed out in my previous letters to you (in thread below, and attached), you are paying more than double what you should be paying.

If you decide to stay your decision on the proposed two year extension, would you please publish any new staff report well ahead of time so that I and other members of the public can have more than a weekend to examine the statistics and prepare our comments?

Regards,

Jim

Thread of earlier correspondence:

Subject:Red light cams on May 16 agenda - San Mateo - my letter to council
Date:Fri, 13 May 2016 14:51:36 -0700
From:Jim <jim>
Reply-To:jim
To:mrfreschet@cityofsanmateo.org, igoethals@cityofsanmateo.org, dlim@cityofsanmateo.org, citymanager@cityofsanmateo.org, rbonilla@cityofsanmateo.org, dpapan@cityofsanmateo.org, shagan@cityofsanmateo.org

5-13-16

Subject: Red light cameras, on May 16 [2016] agenda

Honorable Councilmembers:

I am attaching a report ("TrcaAllCities..."), done by the CHP, which shows that injury collisions dropped 23% statewide, between 2004 and 2013, and persons injured dropped 26%. Those drops are nearly identical to the drops claimed, citywide, in San Mateo over a slightly longer period. (Page 2 of staff report.) What we don't see in the staff report is how the City's camera equipped intersections compared to the statewide/citywide rate, and there is one report - mentioned in my July 7 letter to you (copy below) suggesting that some of the camera equipped intersections may not have dropped at all.

The staff report (page 5) noted the danger that right turns pose to pedestrians. I (again) submit that if the number and severity of collisions caused by right turns at a particular intersection is high and has not declined - or is growing - despite years of photo enforcement, the City should study its records to determine when during the red phase most of those collisions occurred and then install "blank out" signs programmed to light up and prohibit right turns during the high risk portion of the signal cycle.

Finally, I again suggest - as I did on Oct. 3, 2014, copy attached - that you are being asked to pay way too much. Now that your cameras are ten years old, you should be paying \$1500 for them, not \$3985. Over the two years of the proposed extension, you will pay an extra \$298,200, and to cover that you will need to issue tickets to 2982 motorists - of which 924 will be your constituents.

Sincerely,

Jim

Attachments

cc: Media

----- Original Message -----

Subject:Red light cams on May 2 agenda - give public some time to respond - San Mateo
Date:Sat, 30 Apr 2016 14:46:16 -0700
From:Jim <jim>
Reply-To:jim
To:mrfreschet@cityofsanmateo.org, igoethals@cityofsanmateo.org, dlim@cityofsanmateo.org, citymanager@cityofsanmateo.org, rbonilla@cityofsanmateo.org, dpapan@cityofsanmateo.org

4-30-16

Subject: Red light cams - give public some time to respond

Venue: Item 5 on May 2 agenda

Honorable Councilmembers:

Last July I wrote to you:

During a potential five year extension of the City's camera program, 25,000 tickets could be issued, bearing \$13 million in fines, so this decision is an important one and should not be made in haste. Please schedule a council hearing about this. And then, if you want to have good input from all sides - which is the way to make an informed decision - please publish the staff report and proposed contract at least two weeks before the hearing date. (If, instead, normal meeting noticing procedures are followed, the staff report and contract will not be made public until the weekend before the council meeting at which it will be voted upon, leaving the media and general public with little time to report and comment, and the council with almost no time to read and consider those comments.)

First of all, thank you for the action you took in November, asking the police department to provide a more extensive staff report than the one they presented then. Now it appears (see staff memo, attached) that they are almost finished doing the new staff report, and could present it on May 16. So would you please consider my request, to publish the staff report at least two weeks before the hearing date?

I also want to take this opportunity to pass along to you a study, by the City of San Francisco, showing that the vast majority of their cameras have had no beneficial effect. It is attached.

Regards,

Jim

cc: Media

Attachments

----- Original Message -----

Subject:Before you approve 2 more years tonight, are San Mateo's red light cameras working?
Date:Mon, 16 Nov 2015 10:19:54 -0800

11-16-15

To City Staff: Please provide a copy of this email to each councilmember, and to the public.

Venue: Nov. 16 council agenda, item 8, red light cameras

Subject: Before you approve two more years tonight, are San Mateo's red light cameras working?

Honorable Councilmembers:

On July 7 I wrote to you (copy below) expressing my concern about whether the red light cameras are really working to make life safer in San Mateo (and about other camera-related issues). On July 8 Capt. Ratcliffe responded that the City would respond "within the next two weeks or so." By July 27 I had not received the promised response, so I sent a reminder note. To date I have not had a response.

It seems to me that after ten years during which it issued more than 75,000 camera tickets (my total of the annual figures published by highwayrobbery.net) carrying \$37 million in fines, it would be appropriate for the City to commission a professional - and thoroughly independent - statistician to review the program's effect upon safety.

The very brief staff report submitted to yourselves for tonight's meeting also does not address these other concerns I have expressed in my previous letters to you (copies below, and attached):

1. What has the city done during the last ten years - other than operate cameras - to make those intersections safer.
2. Why the monthly rent is so much higher - double - than in other California cities. (The reduction mentioned in the staff report is no reduction - it is merely a re-naming of the Concession I asked about in my Oct. 30, 2014 email to yourselves - copy below.)
3. A discussion of the recent refund of nearly 1000 tickets.
4. The refund (above) was needed because the city overlooked an Aug. 1, 2015 change in the state rules requiring longer yellow lights. Will the required longer yellows and the resulting lower ticket volume affect the financial viability of the program? Will the required longer yellows raise pressure to issue more rolling right tickets?
5. A discussion of why the enforcement needs to be expanded at one of the intersections.
6. A discussion of the Redflex bribery scandal in Chicago and Ohio.
7. A discussion as to why most of the tickets are for rolling right turns.
8. Info as to who gets the tickets - visitors or locals, young or old.

Sincerely,

Jim

cc: Media

----- Original Message -----

Subject: Are San Mateo's red light cameras working?

Date: Tue, 07 Jul 2015 11:53:37 -0700

7-7-15

To City Staff: Please provide a copy of this email to each councilmember, and to the public.

Subject: Are San Mateo's Red Light Cameras Working?

Honorable Councilmembers:

In 2013 and twice in 2014 I wrote to you (copies attached and in thread below) about how much you are paying Redflex, and the lack of an audit trail.

Those problems have not been fixed, but since then I have uncovered additional issues with the City's red light camera program.

1. **At two of the three camera enforced intersections, collisions are the same as before the program started.** Beginning with calendar year 2013, California law (CVC 21455.5(i)) has required each city operating red light cameras to file an annual report disclosing, among other things, the number of tickets broken out by movement (right, left, straight) and the number of collisions before the cameras were installed, vs. the current number. I have attached San Mateo's reports for 2013 and 2014.

Reducing collisions is of paramount importance, yet San Mateo's 2014 report shows that at two of the three intersections, there is no statistically significant reduction - collisions are up slightly, or down slightly. (The 2013 report contains no collision information.) It is also possible that all of the 2014 figures, including the figures for the one intersection for which the report claims a significant reduction in accidents, have been skewed by belt tightening measures enacted during the height of the recession, like those revealed during the March 30 council meeting in the City of Ventura:

"The way the police department reports collisions now is vastly different than we did when we started this program. Now we only report - correct me if I'm wrong - now we only report injury or major property damage collisions. That's different. Our total collision numbers are down quite a bit because the reporting is different."

Claims of big reductions in collisions in San Mateo would also be at odds with statements by the authorities in twenty other cities, who have reported little or no reduction. (To read their statements, read the "Candor" attachment.)

When collision figures show no reduction over the years while ticketing remains steady, that suggests that the City is ticketing many people each year for technical violations having no effect upon safety.

2. **63% of the City's tickets are for right turns,** according to the 2014 annual report. That's about 3000 tickets each year worth about \$1.5 million in fines. There is a growing cloud over such heavy right turn enforcement. Consider this statement found in a Dec. 26, 2014 Wall Street Journal interview of the president of Redflex:

"Mr. [James] Saunders suggests jurisdictions refrain from issuing a [rolling right] ticket except when a pedestrian is in the crosswalk." The headline was, "Can the Red-Light Camera Be Saved? - Money-hungry politicians discredit a hopeful safety innovation." (A Jan. 22, 2015 column in the Dallas Morning News confirmed the statement The Journal had attributed to Saunders: "When I asked Redflex spokeswoman Jody Ryan about her boss' 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.")

I submit that if the number and severity of collisions caused by right turns at a particular intersection is high and has not declined - or is growing - despite years of photo enforcement, the City should study its records to determine when during the red phase most of those collisions occurred and then install "blank out" signs programmed to light up and prohibit right turns during the high risk portion of the signal cycle.

3. **The City files charges in instances - gender and/or age mismatch - where there is no probable cause.** In a recent public records request I asked for:

"The latest version or revision of the City's manual, guidelines, business rules, orders, memos or documents describing the action(s) to be taken by a City employee or agent whose job it is to review violations and approve or disapprove the issuance of a ticket, when he or she observes a clear gender and/or age mismatch between the red light camera photo of the violating driver and the DMV file photo of the registered owner of the vehicle and is not able to identify the violating driver with a sufficient degree of certainty."

In response to that request I received a one page Guidelines for Screening document, attached, which fails to instruct the City personnel reviewing the tickets that they shall not file charges when there is a clear mismatch, i.e., where probable cause is absent. I hope you will be as concerned as I am.

4. **The City's contract with Redflex will expire in November.** I want to take this opportunity to submit some "food for thought," a short list of things that I hope you will ask your staff to discuss in the report they will submit for the (presumed to be) upcoming council discussion of renewal of the contract.

- A. If you ask staff about the percentage of tickets going to visitors to town, most likely you will learn that the huge majority of the tickets are going to visitors. (In the cities discussed in FAQ # 22 on highwayrobbery [dot] net, visitors got between 69% and 98.5% of the tickets. In Menlo Park the figure was 90%.)

That percentage is important because, in an area with high turnover, doing nothing but installing cameras will never stop the running; there's always new visitors, making mistakes because they are in unfamiliar territory and maybe even lost. A visitor won't know that there's a camera up ahead, so the presence of a camera won't, by itself, keep him or her from running the light and endangering the other people - mostly local residents, your constituents - who frequent the same intersection.

If a city genuinely wants to minimize running, and collisions, it will do things like the following, to make the problematic intersection stand out, look more important.

1. Put up more visible signal lights (larger diameter, with bigger backboards, with more of them placed on the "near" side of the wider intersections).
2. Paint "signal ahead" on the pavement.
3. Install lighted overhead street signs for the cross street (also placed on the "near" side), and larger bulbs in the streetlights at the intersection.
4. As described above, install blank out signs prohibiting right turns, where appropriate.

- B. Please ask staff, or Redflex, to report to you the average age of those ticketed, broken down by camera location and type of movement (straight, left, or right). Age is of interest because those intersections where the age of violators is found to be significantly higher probably need to be made more navigable for older drivers. Sometimes it can be as simple as lengthening the yellow light.

- C. A staff report to yourselves will most likely include a letter submitted by Redflex, in which they will discuss the actions the company took after it was alleged that the company spent \$2 million to bribe an official in Chicago. They may also discuss last month's guilty plea in Columbus, Ohio, by Redflex former CEO. But that bribery is common knowledge. What is not common knowledge, and in my opinion worse than the outright bribery that happened in Chicago and elsewhere, is the extent to which California officials, government employees and their associates are immunizing themselves and their families from receiving photo enforcement and toll tickets by exploiting the CVC 1808.4 confidential registration address program. As of 2011, 1.5 million private vehicles in California - about 5% of all registrations - had the confidential registrations, and there are two bills in the legislature right now (AB 222 & SB 372) to extend the privilege to even more people. I would like to suggest that you ask staff how many City employees have the confidential registrations, and also ask the staff of the red light camera program to tell you how they have handled the roughly 300 red light camera tickets earned each year in San Mateo by those enjoying confidential registrations. Suggested questions: How many of those tickets were actually issued; how many of them were paid?

Conclusion

During a potential five year extension of the City's camera program, 25,000 tickets could be issued, bearing \$13 million in fines, so this decision is an important one and should not be made in haste. Please schedule a council hearing about this. And then, if you want to have good input from all sides - which is the way to make an informed decision - please publish the staff report and proposed contract at least two weeks before the hearing date. (If, instead, normal meeting noticing procedures are followed, the staff report and contract will not be made public until the weekend before the council meeting at which it will be voted upon, leaving the media and general public with little time to report and comment, and the council with almost no time to read and consider those

comments.)

Finally, I want to point out that since I wrote to you last, nine more cities have closed their camera programs, leaving just 37 systems out of the 103 once operating in California.

Sincerely,

Jim

cc: Media

----- Original Message -----

Subject:Fwd: San Mateo overpaying for red light cameras - no audit trail
Date:Thu, 30 Oct 2014 11:04:27 -0700

10-30-14

To City Staff: Please provide a copy of this email to each councilmember, and to the public.

Honorable Councilmembers:

In 2013 and on Oct. 3 this year I wrote to you (copies attached) about how much you are paying Redflex.

Since then I've received copies of Redflex' monthly invoices to the City (copy attached), the most recent two of which show \$4980 credits (equal to 20%) entitled "Allowance for other concession."

After I submitted a records request for, "All correspondence, both internal and external, dated Jan. 1, 2009 to the present, regarding the justification for, the negotiation of, or the negotiation of the amount of, the \$4980 Allowance for Contract Concession shown on the Redflex invoice dated June 30, 2014 and any other similar Allowances or Concessions made on invoices dated during 2014," I was told that there is nothing in writing about the concessions.

So far in 2014 the concessions total at least \$14,940.

Is the city council OK with paying invoices that go up and down, when there seems to be no record as to why they do so? And are you OK with the fact that even if the concessions continue to appear each month, you still will be paying too much?

Regards,

Jim

----- Original Message -----

Subject:San Mateo overpaying for red light cameras
Date:Fri, 03 Oct 2014 11:16:12 -0700

10-3-14

For City Staff: Please put the attached letter on the agenda for the next council meeting, under public comments.

Thank you,

Jim

Att: Pdf of 10-3-14 letter

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