


CITY of ST. PETERSBURG

TO: James R. Kennedy, Chair and Members of City Council
FROM: Bill Foster, Mayor 
DATE: Meeting of April 21, 2011
SUBJECT: Intersection Public Safety Program/Red Light Camera Program Overview

OBJECTIVE

This report will detail the benefits and considerations of an intersection public safety program to reduce the occurrences of *Red Light Running*, through a photo enforcement program using camera technology to identify a motor vehicle that fails to stop at a traffic control signal steady red light. The report outlines the details of an Intersection Public Safety Program, illustrating all requirements necessary to implement photo enforcement technology to address red light running at signalized intersections.

PRESENT SITUATION

City Council has directed staff to consider a program with focus on public safety and a goal of reducing the amount of red light running occurrences by motorists, by changing their current behavior, through enforcement.

The City of St. Petersburg is firmly dedicated to maintaining and improving the transportation system for the safe and efficient movement of people, goods, and services. In pursuit of this goal, the City consistently evaluates and monitors the transportation system in search of deficiencies that may be remedied through maintenance and enhancement programs, as outlined in the City of St. Petersburg Comprehensive Plan. The Plan calls out Transportation System Safety and Efficiency as a major issue in the Transportation Element section of the document and offers several objectives to mitigate this issue. Objective T5 describes the City's commitment to safety: "The City shall ensure the safe accommodation of motorized and non-motorized traffic while reducing the incidence of vehicular conflicts within the City's major transportation corridors."

To this end, the City has encountered red-light running as major impedance to public safety. A review of crash data at all signalized intersections in St. Petersburg from January 2008 to September 30, 2010 has determined that 1,219 of 5,950 total crashes or 20.9%, were caused by red light running. While many engineering countermeasures have been implemented and have seen mild to moderate success in reducing red-light violations, the City's Transportation and Parking Department has proactively implemented an Intersection Public Safety Program to further reduce the occurrence of violations. This program coincides with the City's previously stated objectives to provide continuous advancement to the public transportation system.

Red-light running is a serious and dangerous problem, and countermeasures do exist that can increase motorist observance of traffic signals. Common collision deterrence methods involve the *Three E's*: red-light running Education, Enforcement and Engineering. The City's Transportation and Parking Department maintains a city-wide high hazard elimination program, which annually reviews dangerous intersections to resolve traffic safety issues, including red-light running. A city-wide mast arm/back

plate replacement program is also in place, to provide stability to signals against wind and the elements thereby increasing signal visibility and conspicuity as well.

Other more focused engineering countermeasures include retiming of signals within the city in accordance with the formulas created by the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) for yellow and all-red intervals. These modifications can reduce the lure of running a red-light to a hurried motorist as well as provide additional safety in case motorists do challenge the yellow signal and fail to make it across the stop bar before the signal turns red. The Traffic Operations Department also works city-wide to reduce the amount of delay along corridors through coordinated signal timings. Reducing driver delay can reduce motorists' travel time and allow them to make less hurried choices when encountered with red-lights. Finally, the City of St. Petersburg has invested in white enforcement lights to offer a more straightforward and safe alternative to police officers for enforcing traffic signal violations.

These steps demonstrate the City's continual commitment to increasing safety through red-light running deterrence along with their initial endeavor to inhibit red-light violations through conventional means. Overall, these investments in safety programs and adjustments to policy have been wholly worthwhile, but injury crashes at all 298 signalized intersections have not decreased. Red-light running collisions are usually angle type collisions, which are generally more severe. This leads to the conclusion that signalized intersection injury crashes correlate directly with red-light running violations and the City is striving to reduce these costly injury collisions.

PROPOSAL

In some cases, intersection countermeasures, public education programs, and increased law enforcement are not enough to stop red-light running. Once these options have been exhausted, it is time to consider a red-light photo enforcement program. Photo enforcement is most effective when coupled with good legislation and a well defined process. A red-light program will be most successful when public education and law enforcement coalesce with photo enforcement to engender the ideas of fairness and honesty in the system. In development of this program, the City of St. Petersburg selected guidance from two main sources: *Guidance for Using Red Light Cameras*, a joint publication by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) and National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and *Focus on Safety: A Practical Guide to Automated Traffic Enforcement*, published by *The National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running*. The latter source lists 10 important steps for implementing a red-light camera program.

Administration recommends that an implemented program should:

- Include provisions with a contractor that coincides with the Mark Wendell Safety Act.
- Require flexibility in the length of contact, so the City could opt-out at any time after the first year, without penalty.
- Be guaranteed cost neutral, with no additional fees or charges for processing or certified mail and that no unpaid balance to be carried over month to month.
- That in the event the contractor executes a more favorable contract with another public agency, we would be given the same benefits.
- Support with comprehensive Public Education provided throughout the term of the program at no cost to the City, in order to educate motorists and help reduce red-light violations.
- Be flexible in the number of cameras included, with the ability to add, relocate or remove any installations as deemed necessary without charge or penalty.
- That any contractor selected to provide services for a program is experienced in processing violations with the Pinellas County legal system and the Clerk of the Court.

ADVANTAGES

The Intersection Public Safety Program will be coupled with an ongoing public awareness campaign, and conventional police enforcement to guarantee success and fairness. In addition, the Transportation Department will continually monitor and evaluate the program's success, to ensure the program coincides with its initial goals to:

- Enhance safety at signalized intersections in St. Petersburg by reducing the frequency and/or severity of crashes caused by red-light running.
- Provide an additional method of violation enforcement so that police can use resources to fulfill other objectives.
- Raise awareness of safe driving practices in St. Petersburg.

DISADVANTAGES

- Without a program, the City will not have the full resources necessary to reduce significant incidents and serious crashes associated with red light running.
- Without a program, law enforcement personnel enforcement efforts will continue to have limited effect on changing driver behavior because of the limited exposure.

ACTION PLAN

The City of St. Petersburg feels that the addition of red-light photo enforcement can and will provide an additional reduction in severity and/or a reduction in the overall frequency of collisions at signalized intersections.

A well-executed program, including a clear, well-defined process coupled with good legislation from inception, can increase effectiveness, facilitate public acceptance and improve the long term success of a photo enforcement program.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the technical evaluation it is recommended that an Intersection Public Safety Program to reduce the occurrences of *red light running*, through a photo enforcement program using camera technology to identify a motor vehicle that fails to stop at a traffic control signal steady red light, be implemented with a contractor to include all equipment, construction, system implementation, violations processing, service and support at no net cost to the City.