

City of Seattle Traffic Safety Camera Pilot Project

1) Category: Intersection Collisions

2) City of Seattle Traffic Safety Camera Pilot Project, submitted by Chief R. Gil Kerlikowske on behalf of the Traffic Safety Camera Interdepartmental Team (IDT).

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Department of Finance: Greg Doss

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Legislative Department: Peter Harris

Seattle Department of Transportation: Cal Agatsuma, Ralph Carroll, Brian Kemper, and Wayne Wentz

Seattle Municipal Court: Jerry Stein and Shirleen Skogseth

Seattle Police Department: Officers Jim Morgan and Dean Shirey; and Mike Quinn (project manager).

4) Summary of the Project:

In late July 2006, the City of Seattle initiated a 12-month pilot project designed to test the effectiveness of traffic safety cameras – also known as red light cameras – at selected arterial intersections. The purpose of the project was to gauge the extent to which these cameras might reduce the frequency of red light running and associated accidents, events which have become all too frequent in recent years, not only in Seattle but throughout the country.

Altogether, six camera systems were deployed at four intersections in the pilot project. After 12 months, through July 23, 2007, 16,539 citations were issued, with a pay rate exceeding 70%, and more than \$1,076,000 in monetary penalties collected. The pilot project was accompanied by a strong evaluation component.

The main findings of the evaluation are as follows:

- **RED LIGHT RUNNING.** The operation of red light cameras has reduced red light running on the order of 50% over the 12-month study period.
- **TRAFFIC CRASHES.** There is little evidence that cameras have decreased the overall frequency of auto crashes; however, it does appear that cameras have mitigated the severity of crashes. There were fewer injury crashes and fewer persons injured in crashes at test intersections than before cameras were installed. Moreover, severity of crashes at a small number of “control” intersections not equipped with cameras showed an increase, as measured by the number of injury crashes and persons injured.

Based on these findings, the Traffic Safety Camera IDT recommended to Chief Gil Kerlikowske and to Mayor Greg Nickels that the program be expanded significantly in 2008. The Seattle City Council has recently approved the addition of 24 additional cameras at 19 intersections.

5) Best Practices. Based on the results of evaluation, documented in the accompanying report, traffic safety cameras show great promise as a tool for reducing the frequency of red light running and the number and severity of injury crashes at arterial intersections.