



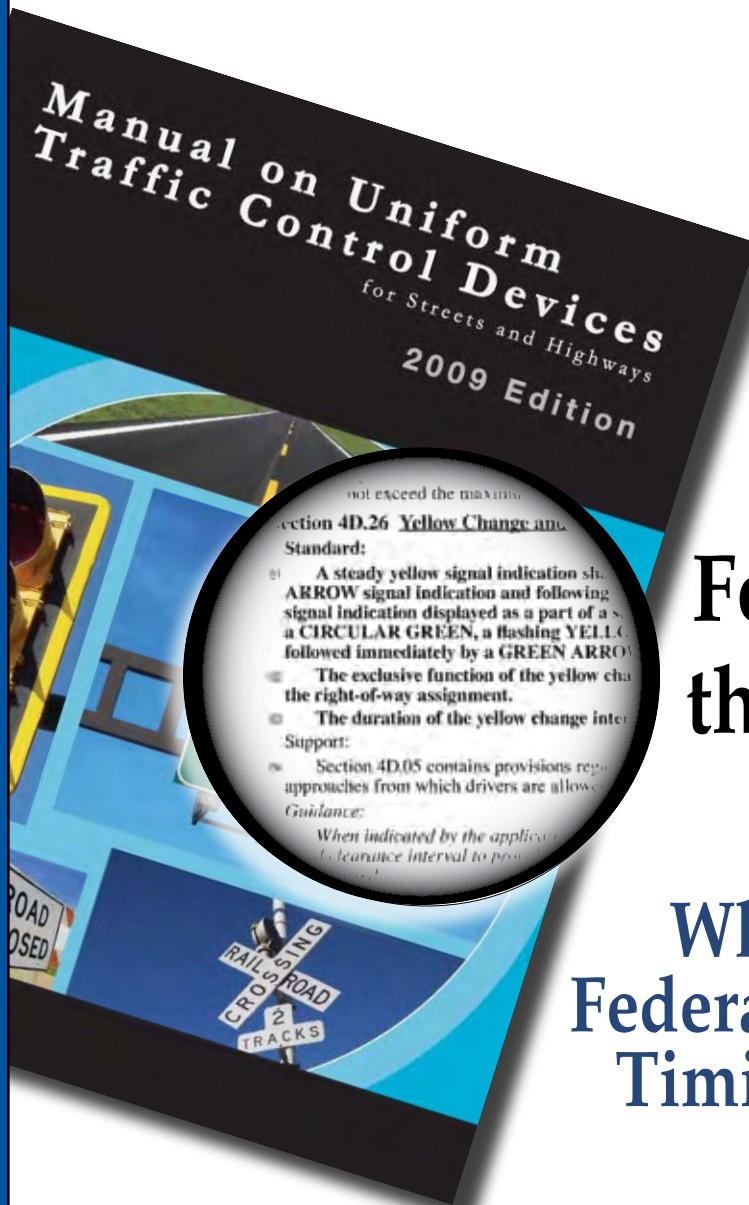
Driving Freedoms

NMA Foundation

Vol. 24 • Issue 1

Fall 2013

The NMA Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to finding innovative ways to improve and protect the interests of North American motorists.



not exceed the maximum
 Section 4D.26 Yellow Change and
 Standard:
 1) A steady yellow signal indication shall be preceded by a GREEN ARROW signal indication and following a steady yellow signal indication displayed as a part of a steady yellow signal, a CIRCULAR GREEN, a flashing YELLOW signal, or a flashing YELLOW signal followed immediately by a GREEN ARROW signal.
 2) The exclusive function of the yellow change interval shall be to provide the right-of-way assignment.
 3) The duration of the yellow change interval shall be determined by the following:
 Support:
 1) Section 4D.05 contains provisions regarding the duration of the yellow change interval for approaches from which drivers are allowed to proceed through the intersection.
 Guidance:
 When indicated by the applicable design speed, the duration of the yellow change interval shall be determined by the following:

Focusing on the MUTCD

Why We Need Federal Yellow-Light Timing Standards

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Driving Freedoms (permit # 0716556-KWP) is the official publication of the NMA Foundation, Inc. Driving Freedoms is published quarterly by the NMA Foundation, Inc., 402 W. 2nd St., Waunakee, WI 53597. (608/849-6000) Email: nma@motorists.org Web site: www.motorists.org. Nonprofit bulk permit paid Madison, WI. Annual membership in the National Motorists Association includes a subscription to Driving Freedoms.

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Cover

“Why We Need Federal Yellow-Light Timing Standards Now”



Will of the People

by Gary Biller, President, NMA

Their arrogance is astounding. Ticket camera vendors such as American Traffic Solutions (ATS) have employed shady tactics in the past to promote their wares. One such tactic included an ATS vice president posing online as a city voter who touted the benefits of red-light cameras to “fellow residents.”

The online source, theNews-paper.com, “a journal of the politics of driving,” has documented many other instances of deception, if not fraud, perpetrated by the camera companies.

Most disturbing of all are the ongoing efforts by ATS and Redflex—the other major player in the ticket camera industry—to subvert the people’s democratic right to determine what is best for the greater good. Their actions remind me why, in 1863, it was so important for our young country that Abraham Lincoln chose the famous phrasing, “government of the people, by the people, and for the people” rather than “government, despite the people.”

ATS has launched legal action to block public access to the ballot in several jurisdictions around the country, with Redmond, Washington and Murrieta, California being among them. In Houston, Texas, after more than 335,000 city residents voted 53 percent to 47 percent to get rid of their red-light cameras, ATS threatened the city with a multi-million dollar lawsuit

if it abided by the people’s vote. The mayor capitulated and kept the cameras operational. The ensuing voter outcry was so negative that she recapitulated and ultimately canceled the contact with ATS.



The Murrieta case is the most recent. ATS pumped more than \$100,000 into a local political action committee, along with legal fees, to prevent a vote at the ballot box on the red-light camera program—this for a city with a population of about 100,000. When that attempt failed, company efforts turned to convincing voters to defeat the measure.

Murrieta resident Diana Serafin led the grassroots effort by gathering more than the necessary number of petition signatures to validate the voting initiative. She also pounded the pavement in the weeks leading up to the November 6th voting, placing lawn signs supporting her anti-camera initiative, and circulating homemade flyers.

(Continued on Page 3)

Preparation Key to Winning in MA Traffic Court

(Name withheld on request), NMA Massachusetts Member

I received a speeding ticket on I-90 near Ludlow, Massachusetts. Some people wondered why I bothered to fight it, but because I have been “well trained” by the NMA, I always go to court for these issues, if for no other reason than to make the courts “earn” their money... and because of the NMA Traffic Justice Program, too!

At the hearing my key argument was that there was a car next to me when the officer took my LIDAR reading. Due to the distance to the target (1,426 feet) and the resulting width of the beam, the reading had to be wrong. What’s more, this car pulled over with me and was let go for going 65 mph while I



was supposedly going 83 mph. Since I never passed that car, and I actually was behind it when we got pulled over, there is no way I could have been going 83 while he was going 65.

To prepare I wrote up a “script” of my questions and the officer’s expected answers. (Rule of court—never ask a question you don’t already know the answer to) This way, through my nervousness, I could simply read the script and follow the plan without having to think on my feet too much.

As the officer started to present his story, I mentally checked off his statements, to ensure he had provided enough “evidence” against me. Due to the informal setting of this hearing, I wasn’t sure what I’d do with this, but I was following my script.

But then I looked over and noticed he was reading (almost verbatim) from the citation. I couldn’t believe he was being so blatant about it, so I objected to the judge that the officer was reading from his notes. The judge almost jumped down my throat for speaking out of turn, but then realized I had a reasonable objection. Even so, she decided to let the officer continue.

After the officer finished, I was asked if I had any questions for the officer. I told the judge that I was making a motion for dismissal due to lack of proper discovery. Like any good NMA member, I had sent a discovery request to prove the LIDAR was calibrated, properly maintained, etc., but my letter went unanswered (as is common).

I provided the judge with a copy of the letter, the tracking information (always send it via certified mail), and the supporting information from the supervisor of records saying this information needs to be provided as requested, and not ignored without reason. Lastly, I presented evidence of precedent on this issue from the appellate court (*Newton PD v DeVasher*).

The judge took all this information, and spent a good long time reading the appellate court ruling thoroughly. She then handed the letter to the officer and asked him to look at it to see if he recalled receiving it.

The officer said he didn’t have the certification information with him because he had not seen the letter until that moment and didn’t realize that the certification would be needed. (Funny, I have an internal memo from the state police saying that officers should expect to need this in court. I guess he was expecting me to skip out!) At this point, the judge said she had no choice but to find me not responsible.

What have I learned from this encounter? First, preparation is key. No one in court knows anything about the situation—not even the officer. You need to bring the information you need to prove your case.

Second, the officers and even the magistrate sometimes don’t understand their own rules. I was lied to and yelled at in the magistrate hearing (about discovery procedure, LIDAR “accuracy,” etc). It’s all a scare tactic. Be prepared with printouts for rules and regulations, preferably from authoritative sources such as state websites.

Finally, *Newton PD v DeVasher* is like gold for us in Massachusetts. Traffic defendants in other states should do the research to see if they can find a similar case that applies to them. ■

2012 Foundation Fundraising Campaign Ends on High Note

An aggressive fundraising goal of \$100,000 was set for the year, even though that giving level had only been reached once before in the 13-year history of the NMA Foundation. The current and long-running economic malaise combined with the fact that virtually all of the donations received are from hard-working NMA members, not special interest groups, made that “stretch” goal that much harder to realize.

In an early December letter to members, we estimated the campaign would plateau at \$92,000, still the second-highest annual fundraising total. As the year closes out, we are very pleased to announce that the NMA Foundation received donations totaling \$93,844 in 2012, providing essential funding for the Foundation’s public grant program. Thank you for such generous and meaningful support of the NMA Foundation.



NMA Washington Report

by Robert Talley, NMA Lobbyist



Congress concludes 2012 with a mixed record on transportation issues. Surface transportation funding was reauthorized for another two years, but the 112th Congress failed to address the funding shortfall awaiting the highway trust fund. But funding isn't the only issue on the agenda for the next two years. Below we look ahead to some of the issues that are likely to shape the debate.

Highway Trust Fund: Funding the highway trust fund will have to be a high priority for the incoming Chairman of the House Transportation Committee, Bill Shuster (R-PA). Interestingly, he has responded to press inquiries saying he's not averse to reopening the gas tax discussion—an idea that has been verboten among Republicans for a long time. Indeed, with comprehensive tax reform a possibility for 2013, it is hard to imagine that increasing the gasoline tax will not be part of the discussion, but the outcome is far from certain.

Environment: While Shuster may consider revisiting the gas tax, an idea that is getting increasing atten-

tion in Washington is likely to get a less favorable reception: the carbon tax. Policymakers in DC, alarmed at the failure of Congress to address US emissions of greenhouse gasses, are proposing to tax carbon emissions in order to balance the budget while sending an economic price signal to consumers to de-carbonize. Though popular among the environmental think tanks and policy wonks, this will be a tough sell to the American public.

Oil and Gas Development: In a story that could not be foreseen five years ago, the rapid deployment of unconventional drilling technologies to develop domestic oil and gas reserves once deemed unreachable has created a dramatic shift in the balance of energy power.

According to the US Energy Information Agency, the United States could reach energy independence by 2030. Don't look for a break at the pump though, the same agency forecasts average annual oil prices at or above \$100 per barrel for the foreseeable future.

Renewable Energy: The current federal policy to annually increase the

percentage of renewable fuels sold appears to be meeting increasing resistance. Many question the wisdom of the current policy, which was implemented prior to our newfound domestic oil and gas energy abundance. The EPA's rollout of E15 blends of gasoline is raising concerns about consumer safety, and the increasing percentage of the nation's food crop dedicated to fuel development (40 percent of the corn crop alone) is having a noticeable impact on food prices.

Privacy: Privacy is expected to get increasing scrutiny as the world is drawn together by advancing technology that is increasingly able to identify individual activities. Motorists' privacy rights will be impacted as new technology facilitates the ability of corporations and governments to determine not only where you are but how you got there, how long you've been there and, ultimately, to predict where you are likely to go next.

The NMA will monitor these debates and inform its membership and policymakers about its priorities as events unfold. ■

Will of the People

(Continued from Page 1)

Serafin spent less than \$2,000, about \$800 of which was contributed proudly by the NMA to help finance two prominent ads in the local newspaper the weekend before the election.

Her efforts were rewarded handsomely with a 57 to 43 percent vote to eliminate Murrieta's red-light cameras.

ATS hasn't given up. After the thumping by Murrieta voters

on November 6th, ATS filed suit in the Court of Appeal through its political action committee, reverting to its original argument that traffic regulations are not subject to voter initiatives.

I asked the indefatigable Serafin what her plans were to counteract ATS's current effort to keep the cameras working in her town. She vowed to continue talking to people

on the streets, making sure they know exactly what is at stake. She also told me that she has a simple backup plan designed to grab the attention of local politicians who ignore the will of the people: recall the three of five city council members who support the red-light cameras.

In a properly functioning democracy, actions truly do have consequences. ■

NMA Foundation Sweepstakes Travel

Grand prize winners of the 2011 NMA Foundation sweepstakes, NMA member Bruce Farr and his wife Gail, enjoyed a seven day, six night driving tour of the German countryside. Their “Romantik Road Special” driving tour began in Frankfurt and wound leisurely through several historic towns and centuries-old castles culminating in Munich.



Bruce and Gail with their touring car, a wonderful Audi A4 Avant



Neuschwanstein Castle



A view through a gate at Rothenburg



View from hotel, Fussen

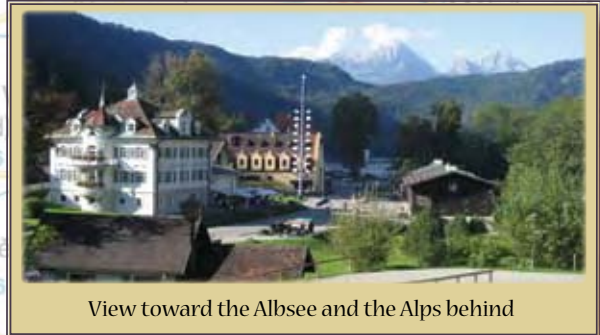


Looking toward the Zugspitze

Itinerary: A Driving Tour of Germany



Market square and Town Hall, Rothenburg



View toward the Albsee and the Alps behind



Neues Rathaus (Town Hall), Munich



Hofgarten, Munich



Howenschwangau Castle

The tour was sponsored by the NMA Foundation in conjunction with DriveEurope.com, a company that specializes in organizing unique European driving vacations. "Everything worked perfectly with getting the car, hotels, tickets for attractions, etc.," Bruce reported. "The Romantic Road was really interesting and the towns for stopovers, along with the hotels, were really well chosen." To read more about the Farr's trip, visit blog.motorists.org/nma-foundation-driving-tour-germany/.

Why We Need Federal Yellow-Light Timing Standards Now

Every day millions of US drivers are put at risk by something that could be corrected with a few strokes of a pen. We're talking about short yellow-light times, and we're deeply concerned that no federal standards exist to determine how long those times should be.

Studies and real-world examples show that properly timed yellow lights can substantially reduce intersection collisions and red-light running violations.

Given these benefits, we're amazed that the yellow-light guidelines contained in the federal Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) do not mandate standardized minimum yellow-light intervals. Nor do they require yellow-light times to be tied to the speed of vehicles approaching the intersection—as established by standard traffic engineering practice.

This is why NMA President Gary Biller has called on the head of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Victor Mendez, to address the obvious deficiency in the MUTCD.

In his letter from last November (reprinted on pages 8-9), Biller referred to paragraph 4D.26 of the MUTCD: “‘A yellow change interval should have a minimum duration of 3 seconds and a maximum duration of 6 seconds.’ The MUTCD contains no specific qualification that ties yellow-light timing to the vehicular 85th percentile approach speed for a given intersection. Yet, that approach speed is the most critical parameter in setting a safe yellow-light cycle.”

Biller also cited the example of Loma Linda, California, which increased its yellow-light times by 1.0 second and achieved a 92 percent reduction in red-light violations. He also referenced a 2004 Texas Transportation Institute study in which a 1.0 second increase in yellow-light duration corresponded to a 40 percent reduction in intersection crashes.

The logic is simple. When yellow lights are set too short, drivers don't have enough time to react and brake before the light turns red. Responsible drivers are forced to make split-second decisions that can lead to many unwarranted traffic tickets, or worse: high numbers of rear-end collisions as motorists slam on the brakes.

Together with right-turn-on-red citations, short yellow lights provide the foundation on which all profitable red-light camera programs are built. Camera operators use these deficient standards to encourage yellow-light times that are too short to allow safe passage through the intersection. This artificially inflates violation rates and keeps profits flowing. Policymakers justify this unsafe and abusive practice by pointing out that their programs comply technically with MUTCD guidelines.

If the camera operators were required to set appropriate yellow-light times, the cameras would quickly become unprofitable and the programs would collapse. The NMA's letter to Mendez proposed a simple but effective solution: establishment of a national requirement that sets minimum yellow-light intervals.

Specifically, the NMA urged the FHWA to adopt a standard based on the Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) yellow-light timing formula because it factors in how fast vehicles travel as they approach the intersection. Yellow-light times must account for actual travel speed, not the posted speed, since actual travel speeds can be up to 15 mph higher. Basing yellow-light times on posted speeds results in yellow lights that are still too short.

The FHWA does tout the benefits of the ITE approach on its website. It's worth noting that its website also states, “...the Federal Highway Administration is responsible for ensuring that America's roads and highways continue to be

among the safest and most technologically sound in the world.”

We understand that many NMA members are uncomfortable with national mandates, federal oversight and the like. We object when the federal government tries to coerce the states to comply with its wishes, usually through withholding federal highway funds unless a state implements a specific transportation/enforcement policy. However, when it comes to issues of basic highway safety, the federal government must play role.

While the states do set their own traffic laws, the MUTCD establishes certain highway engineering standards that must be consistently applied from state to state for safety's sake. It ensures, for example, that all traffic control devices across the country are used exactly the same way so that all drivers have a consistent understanding of what the regulations are. The FHWA has a responsibility to address yellow-light durations in the same fashion.

So, why hasn't it? The science behind reaction time and braking distance is the same everywhere, and it is one of the most critical parameters in the intersection safety equation. The MUTCD should set standards for minimum yellow-light times but allow the states to set longer times (within limits) if they choose.

With this national push, has the NMA abandoned its focus on lobbying at the state and local levels? Not in the least. But our platform with state and federal policymakers as well as the media allows us to create nationwide public awareness for traffic safety issues. This, in turn, helps influence federal highway policy while supporting the work of NMA members locally.

Think of the impact camera opponents working at the state or local level

(Continued top of next page)



would have if they could target camera operators who were not in compliance with federal safety mandates. Even if the cameras did survive and were brought into compliance, they would not last long. That's because adequate yellow-light times reduce violation rates to a point where the cameras become financially unsustainable.

New Jersey's red-light camera program illustrates the importance of setting national requirements. Last spring, NMA member Steve Carrellas and New Jersey Assemblyman Declan O'Scanlon raised serious questions about the legality of the state's pilot camera program.

At issue were the yellow-light times at 63 of the 85 camera-equipped intersections in the state. To complicate matters, New Jersey statute specifies one standard for yellow-light durations, while New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) standards state another. Which is correct? The cameras were shut down pending a review by NJDOT. After a hasty "recertification" process, and despite post-certification irregularities uncovered by the NMA, the cameras were turned back on.

The critical question of which timing standard is correct (or legal) appears to

have been sidestepped. O'Scanlon has introduced legislation to overhaul the state's red-light camera program through longer yellow times and other fixes.

New Jersey is not alone. Motorists have filed a class-action lawsuit against the City of New York and its 150 red-light cameras. At issue: the manipulation of yellow-light times to increase red-light violations. New York statutes make no provision for standardized yellow-light intervals, so the city has free reign to short change yellow-light times while hiding behind non-binding MUTCD recommendations. This is how it justifies the collection of tens of millions of dollars in unwarranted photo ticket fines annually.

Camera foes in New York and New Jersey face tough fights against well-resourced ticket camera companies and their entrenched partners in the bureaucracy. Consider how much easier these fights would be if the anti-camera forces could simply demonstrate that the programs were not in compliance with federal mandates.

Similar fights have taken place across the country. These bitter and costly battles will continue until the FHWA steps up to mandate acceptable minimum yellow-light timing standards. When this happens, disputes over which standards apply and whether or not cameras are in compliance will become moot.

Camera operators won't be able to hide behind feckless, unsafe guidelines. Cities will have to operate camera programs based on proven safety and engineering standards. At the very least, motorists will benefit from safer intersections and fewer citations. Under a best case scenario, the ticket camera programs will collapse.

Shortening yellow lights in the name of profit represents a violation of the public trust. The FHWA has the power to correct the situation. The NMA will keep pushing until it does. ■

Gary Biller's letter urging the FHWA to take action to strengthen yellow-light change interval standards prompted a constructive response from the agency's Associate Administrator for Operations Jeffrey Lindley. Mr. Lindley assigned one of his staff, Bruce Friedman, as a direct contact for the NMA. (See the full text of the Lindley letter at www.motorists.org/other/FHWAResponse-Letter-12-04-2012.pdf)

Friedman has expressed support for the NMA's position of a stronger standard per the MUTCD, and he has exchanged draft language with Biller in the past few weeks. Friedman also invited the NMA to attend the National Committee for Uniform Traffic Control Devices conference in Arlington, Virginia in January. This is an annual conference where 150 professionals discuss and recommend MUTCD improvements to the FHWA. The NMA will be represented at the conference.

Our most recent push to eliminate short yellow lights attracted the attention of the editors at *Car and Driver* magazine. This passage appeared in the January 2013 issue of the magazine: *"In spite of studies proving that longer yellow lights reduce collisions, light timing varies widely across the nation. This doesn't sit well with the NMA, and it's urging the FHA to issue national regulations. The fact that RLC operators can exploit this loophole to shorten yellows and pad their revenue also motivated the NMA . . . more predictable and safer light timing is a cause we can get behind."*

NMA Letter to FHWA Head Victor Mendez, Page 1

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November 15, 2012

Mr. Victor Mendez, Administrator
Federal Highway Administration
1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, D.C. 20590

Dear Mr. Mendez,

The *Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices* (MUTCD), which falls under the auspices of your agency, contains a deficiency that requires rectification. I urge you to take immediate action.

An academic study and several case histories have proven conclusively that properly set yellow light intervals help establish minimal red-light violation rates and maximum safety benefits. Yet Paragraph 4D.26 (*Yellow Change and Red Clearance Intervals*) of the MUTCD gives each state maximum latitude to set dangerously short yellow-light durations.

Paragraph 4D.26 notes as guidance: "A yellow change interval should have a minimum duration of 3 seconds and a maximum duration of 6 seconds." That MUTCD section contains no specific qualification that ties yellow-light timing to the vehicular 85th percentile approach speed for a given intersection. Yet, that approach speed is the most critical parameter in setting a safe yellow-light cycle.

The study referenced above, *Effect of Yellow-Interval Timing on Red-Light-Violation Frequency at Urban Intersections* (Bonneson and Zimmerman, Texas Transportation Institute, July 2003), concludes that **lengthening the yellow light interval by as little as 0.5 to 1.5 seconds decreases the incidence of red-light running violations by 50 percent or more.**

Several cities throughout the country subsequently added 1.0 second to their yellows and achieved a violation reduction consistent with the researchers' findings. Loma Linda, California, in fact, saw their red-light violations drop 92 percent almost overnight. That was three years ago. Since then, the longer yellow intervals have been maintained and so have the lower red-light violation rates.

Bonneson and Zimmerman released a later study, *Development of Guidelines for Identifying and Treating Locations with a Red-Light-Running Problem* (Texas Transportation Institute, September 2004) that just as remarkably demonstrated that **a 1.0 second increase in yellow light duration corresponded to a 40 percent reduction in intersection crashes.**

In the wake of these findings, the MUTCD should establish a national requirement for a minimum yellow-light change interval, one that enhances intersection safety by replacing the current general guideline in 4D.26 that allows states to set short yellows that are unsafe to motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians.

NMA Letter to FHWA Head Victor Mendez, Page 2

A standard for setting minimum yellow-light intervals exists and is widely accepted in the traffic engineering community. The Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) has set forth a straight-forward kinematic formula, one that is presented prominently on your website at http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/intersection/redlight/outreach/marketing/rlr_pps022509/long/ (ref. Slide 28) as that standard.

A simple example illustrates why the FHWA's MUTCD should be brought into compliance with the agency's own definition of minimally adequate yellow-light intervals:

Chicago posts speed limits of 30 mph which are 8 to 12 mph lower than intersection approach speeds of normal-flowing traffic. Therefore, the city's yellow-light intervals should be set at least at 4.0 seconds. (A 40 mph approach speed plugged into the ITE kinematic formula results in a minimum yellow of 3.93 seconds.) However, the Chicago DOT locks all of their yellow intervals in at the bare minimum 3.0 seconds.

That 1.0 second differential between the ITE standard and the MUTCD non-binding guidance in this common example can account for red-light violation and accident rates that are double-digit percentage points higher than need be. Cities justify the short yellow intervals by pointing to 4D.26 in the MUTCD, as if that is adequate reasoning for subjecting the driving public to improperly engineered intersections. Unfortunately the truth is that the lenient guidelines of 4D.26 in the national MUTCD do allow 3.0 second yellows without regard to traffic approach speeds.

Short yellow lights put motorists at risk even further by allowing cities to ticket red-light violations that wouldn't be citations with proper signal timing. It is not surprising that Chicago is able to generate annual red-light camera ticket revenue in excess of \$70 million by setting its yellow lights at deficient 3.0 second intervals. This forces many conscientious drivers to make split-second decisions of whether to jam on their brakes while risking sudden, rear-end collisions, or to proceed through the intersection, hoping a quick change from yellow to red doesn't cost them a ticket.

Chicago is not alone in this. Any city that operates a red-light camera program and establishes yellow-light timing less than that determined per the ITE formula and the 85th percentile approach speed is similarly violating the public trust.

Mr. Mendez, I urge you to close the loophole in 4D.26 of the MUTCD by replacing the current overly general guidance with the ITE standard for determining minimum yellow-light change intervals, and to do so with a particular urgency because of the safety implications faced daily by motorists across the country.

Sincerely,



Gary Biller
President



Members Write

Editor's Note: NMA members responded to a variety of the topics covered in our weekly e-newsletters, including how to set side view mirrors to reduce blind spots and police sting operations to enforce anti-texting laws. Some reader comments follow.

As a retired police officer, I am appalled that any jurisdiction would actually waste the taxpayers' money to enforce one particular traffic infraction (DUI being a criminal offense). In addition to the unconscionable waste of money, there is also the issue of the re-allocation of police resources from more important areas of responsibility. In this era of an economy that is barely chugging along on life support and every police chief in the country is scrambling to get more funding, it is inconceivable to me that funds and manpower are being squandered to combat texting while driving.

If one takes the position, as I do, that the creation of task forces to combat texting is just one more money-grabbing scam, just like red-light cameras have shown to be, then this all becomes crystal-clear. Spy SUVs? Drones? What is America devolving into?

*Dave Podesta
Brooklyn, NY*

I've also been setting my mirrors in a similar fashion for decades: My technique is to adjust the rearview from my normal seating position to look straight out to the rear and then note what object can be seen in the far left edge; I then adjust my driver-side mirror so the inside edge of that mirror just begins

to reflect the same object. Likewise in reverse for the passenger-side mirror. As your writer noted, this is a far more efficient use of your mirrors and just as something starts to disappear from the rearview, it will start to show up in one of the side mirrors; when it begins to pass out of your side-mirror, it begins to come into your peripheral vision

Another thought: For years, I've used little half-moon shaped adjustable mirrors attached with industrial-strength double-stick foam mounting tape to either the outside of my side-view mirrors or the underside—both adjusted to look where the rear wheel meets the pavement. This allows you to position your car within lines or against a curb with remarkable accuracy when backing into a parking space.

*David Roberson
Ann Arbor, MI*

Visibility, or rather lack of it, is a problem that has been getting worse over time. I have also learned to adjust my mirrors so that I can see what is in the lanes next to me, even though they don't look right that way, and even over the objections of other drivers of my cars. It helps, but is by no means a cure-all for the limited visibility available in today's cars.

All the mirrors and neck twisting in the world don't address one very common occurrence that results in many close calls and actual accidents on high speed multi-lane highways. That is when two drivers at the same time switch lanes—into the same lane at the same spot at the same time. They both checked their mirrors, both looked over their shoulders,

both signaled, and both pulled into the same lane at the same time.

But what can you do? Now when I change lanes I have to make sure that not only the lane I want to change to is clear, but also that there is nobody in the lane next to that who might be interested in moving into the same spot I want to occupy.



Greatly improved mirrors would help. I have tried some of the after market mirrors that are available, but with limited success. I have tried a wide angle camera that sits on the roof and gives side and rear visibility through 180 degrees, but that doesn't totally do the job either.

The only foolproof solution I can think of would be an offshoot of the totally computer controlled car -- once our cars are controlled by computers, then the computers can talk to each other out there, and will thereby have enough information to know exactly where all other cars are and when they intend to change lanes. Then we can relax and read a good book while our cars take us safely where we want to go.

*Dick Goodwin
Portsmouth, NH*

The views expressed in member letters do not necessarily represent those of the NMA. Your letters are welcomed and should not exceed 300 words. They may be edited for length or clarity. Full-length articles will also be considered and should not exceed 600 words. Submissions may be emailed to nma@motorists.org or mailed to 402 W 2nd St., Waunakee, WI 53597



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as "NMA Driving News" at www.motorists.org

National

The National Cooperative Highway Research Program, sponsored by state transportation officials, released guidelines highlighting the safety benefits of longer yellow light times at intersections. The report found that most yellow light times would need to be lengthened by approximately half-a-second if its recommendations were adopted. Some states, such as Ohio and Georgia, have reduced red-light running after enacting laws mandating longer yellow light times.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration finalized a long-awaited proposal to make event data recorders standard on all new vehicles. The White House Office of Management Budget completed a review of the proposal to make so-called vehicle "black boxes" mandatory in all cars and trucks, clearing the way for NHTSA to publish its final regulation.

California

A recently enacted law that was portrayed as protecting the rights of motorists accused of red-light camera violations was actually written by camera operator Redflex Systems. The NMA and other anti-camera activists vigorously opposed the law and warned that it would be harmful to motorists if passed.

Florida

The Florida Supreme Court agreed to take up the issue of red-light cameras after lower courts issued conflicting rulings. Lower court cases focused on the issue of whether

tickets issued prior to the enactment of statewide legislation authorizing ticket cameras were in fact legal.

Iowa

An Oregon man who got a speeding ticket after his rental car was flashed by a speed camera in Sioux City claimed he was hundreds of miles away at the time. Ken Benkstein attributed the error to a camera malfunction, but officials refused to dismiss the \$168 ticket, despite the fact that Benkstein provided credible witnesses and documentation to support his story.

Maryland

After ticket cameras were repeatedly vandalized (one was shot, another set on fire), officials in Prince George's County have come up with a novel way to deter further damage: Secondary cameras have been installed to monitor the speed cameras. (Now we know who's watching the watchers ... It's the watchers!)

Texas

Texas made headlines when it posted the highest speed limit in the Western Hemisphere, 85 mph, on a 41-mile stretch of toll road between Austin and San Antonio. "Safety advocates" howled at the posting, but state transportation officials assured the public that the speed limit was set properly using established traffic engineering methodology.

A man arrived at a municipal court and attempted to pay a \$137 traffic ticket with 137 origami pigs fashioned with dollar bills and boxed in two Dunkin Donut trays. A city clerk refused to accept his creative

payment method however and forced him to unfold each every one of his painstakingly made creations.

Washington, D.C.

The District took in nearly \$85 million in fiscal year 2012 from its sprawling network of speed and red-light cameras, shattering its previous record and inflaming an ongoing debate about ticket-based fines. In the 2011 fiscal year, the District logged about \$55 million in traffic camera fines, a record at the time. ■

This information is current at time of printing. For more information on this and other motorist news, visit www.motorists.org

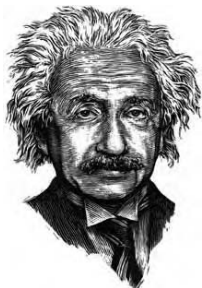
Benefit Upgrade for Supporting Members

The good folks at *From Car to Finish*, part of the NMA Experts Corner, have extended a generous offer that benefits NMA members and the association.

Now, when NMA members use *From Car to Finish* to negotiate their next vehicle purchase, they will receive \$15 off of the regular fee by using or mentioning the discount code "NMA15" when placing an order online or by phone. The NMA also benefits because the company will send \$15 to the association every time this promo code is used. For more information, visit www.fromcartofinish.com or call 240-403-1069. The site also provides tools and advice to research, price and negotiate for a new vehicle.

Many thanks to Mike Rabkin with *From Car to Finish* for supporting drivers' rights and for providing members with this valuable service.

The Experts Corner



If you have a question that only an expert can answer, the NMA can help. The experts here have volunteered to help you. Please mention that you're an NMA member when you contact them.

This is not intended for listing of commercial business services.

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CA Traffic Ticket Defense
Sherman Ellison
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**DUI, Traffic Law,
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Mark Steven Virovatz
3100 Richmond, Suite 450
Houston, TX 77098
713-664-7188

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David Haenel
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**Radar/Laser Detectors:
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**Performance Techniques for
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Teen Driving
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Emissions

**CFC's & the Ozone Layer
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Trust...V1 earns it one ambush at a time

Bogey Counter

Tells how many: Radar hiding within a false alarm? Two radars working the same road? Reads instantly.

Radar Strength

More LEDs glow as radar strengthens.



Radar Locator

Tracks one or more radars at the same time; points to each.



RECEIVED BY EMAIL

V1 sez:
"LONE RANGER ONCOMING."

Hello Mr. Valentine:

Here's how much I trust my V1. Two beeps and I go Condition Red.

I was on 98 through Florida's panhandle. Only a two laner but the swath it cuts through Tyndall AFB is wide enough for a freeway, a broad ribbon of grass without interruption for a dozen miles, flat as the nearby Gulf of Mexico. A car pulled off the pavement is visible for miles, heh, heh, which means the speed nazis have no place to hide. So they adapt.

V1 gave me two beeps, weak ones, arrow pointing ahead. Then silence.

A few more beeps, arrow ahead, a singleton on the Bogey Counter. Then nothing. Traffic was light, only two cars in sight, one a half-mile ahead, another just a red speck in the distance. And a semi oncoming just my side of the speck.

More beeps, getting stronger, arrow still forward. The car ahead looked about even with the semi. A two-beep warning, by itself, isn't much to go on, but V1 tells me more—one Bogey ahead, strengthening as I go, says "lone ranger coming at me." So I locked the cruise on a legal 60 and waited.

Just as I met the 18-wheeler, "Beeeeeeeeeeeeeep!" And there he was, a Florida black-and-tan tucked in tight behind the semi trailer where oncoming cars couldn't see him, holding his instant-on till I was too close to defend. It's a wicked trap, but V1 had him every time he zapped the cars ahead.

All I had to do is trust V1. How can you not trust a detector that points to the trap?

Mick D. (identity protected)
Tallahassee, FL

Mike Valentine
Radar Fanatic

RECEIVED BY EMAIL

V1 sez: "DON'T BELIEVE
IT'S JUST A TRAILER!"

Hey Mike:

I gotta tell you about the Blue-Light Special that V1 found for me. It was Saturday morning and I was in my grins car heading to her house to pick up Danny boy for the day. Heck yes, I took the ridge route.

This road was all fun back before the rock slide. Now it's interrupted by a 25-mph construction zone and a "your speed is" trailer.

No workers today, of course, but the trailer still woke V1 up. As I braked, a string of crotch rockets zoomed large in my rearview, five of them, right on my butt as I passed the trailer.

V1's WARNING OF A NEW BOGEY. "De-deet," said V1. Then "de-deet" again. And another "de-deet." The Counter showed four signals where I normally see one. One arrow pointed behind to the trailer as usual, but that leaves three in the wild. The flashing arrow points ahead.

We'd barely cleared the zone when the rockets blew by me, exhausts shrieking, the bikes laid over for the uphill left hander. They vanished over the crest. Me, I just moseyed, eyes out for three jokers. Just over the hill—Bingo!—a sheriff SUV hidden in the bushes. That's joker no. 1. Two more somewhere.

At that point the view opens as the road sweeps right over the valley. And maybe a half-mile ahead, light bars strobing blue, jokers no. 2 and 3 angled across the road, blocking five bikers still astride their motionless sickles.

V1 really works, except for those who don't have one yet.

Cal R. (identity protected)
State College, PA

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