
Red Light Camera Fact Sheet

With properly posted speed limits and properly installed and timed traffic-control devices, there is no need for ticket cameras. They can actually make our roads less safe.

1) Ticket cameras do not improve safety

Despite the claims of companies that sell ticket cameras and provide related services, there is no independent verification that photo enforcement devices improve highway safety, reduce overall accidents, or improve traffic flow. Believing the claims of companies that sell photo enforcement equipment or municipalities that use this equipment is like believing any commercial produced by a company that is trying to sell you something.

2) There is no certifiable witness to the alleged offense

A picture may be worth a thousand words, but it may also take a thousand words to explain what the picture really means. Even in those rare instances where a law enforcement officer is overseeing a ticket camera, it is highly unlikely that the officer would recall the supposed violation. For all practical purposes, there is no “accuser” for motorists to confront, which is a constitutional right. There is no one who can personally testify to the circumstances of the alleged violation, and just because a camera unit was operating when it was set up does not mean it was operating properly when the picture was taken of any given vehicle.

3) Ticketed recipients are not adequately notified

Most governments using ticket cameras send out tickets via first class mail. There is no guarantee that the accused motorist will even receive the ticket, let alone understand it and know how to respond. However, the government makes the assumption that the ticket was received. If motorists fail to pay, it is assumed that they did so on purpose, and a warrant may be issued for their arrest.

4) The driver of the vehicle is not positively identified

Typically, the photos taken by these cameras do not identify the driver of the offending vehicle. The owner of the vehicle is mailed the ticket, even if the owner was not driving the vehicle and may not know who was driving at the time. The owner of the vehicle is then forced to prove his or her innocence, often by identifying the actual driver who may be a family member, friend, or employee.

5) Ticket recipients are not notified quickly

People may not receive citations until days or sometimes weeks after the alleged violation. This makes it very difficult to defend oneself because it would be hard to remember the circumstances surrounding the supposed violation. There may have been a reason that someone would be speeding or in an intersection after the light turned red. Even if the photo was taken in error, it may be very hard to recall the day in question.

6) These devices discourage the synchronization of traffic lights

When red-light cameras are used to make money for local governments, those governments are unlikely to jeopardize this income source. This includes traffic light synchronization, which is the elimination of unneeded lights and partial deactivation of other traffic lights during periods of low traffic. When properly done, traffic light synchronization decreases congestion, pollution, and fuel consumption.

7) Cameras do not prevent most intersection accidents

Intersection accidents are just that, accidents. Motorists do not casually drive through red lights. More likely, they do not see a given traffic light because they are distracted, impaired, or unfamiliar with their surroundings. Even the most flagrant of red-light violators will not drive blithely into a crowded intersection, against the light. Putting cameras on poles and taking pictures will not stop these kinds of accidents.

8) There are better alternatives to cameras

If intersection controls are properly engineered, installed and operated, there will be very few red-light violations. From the motorist’s perspective, government funds should be used on improving intersections, not on ticket cameras. Even in instances where cameras were shown to decrease certain types of accidents, they increased other accidents. Simple intersection and signal improvements can have lasting positive effects, without negative consequences. Cities can choose to make intersections safer with sound traffic engineering or make money with ticket cameras. Unfortunately, many pick money over safety.

9) Ticket camera systems are designed to inconvenience motorists

Under the guise of protecting motorist privacy, the court or private contractor that sends out the tickets often refuses to include a copy of the photo to the accused vehicle owner. This is really because many of the photos do not clearly depict the driver or the driver is obviously not the vehicle owner. Typically, the vehicle owner is forced to travel to a courthouse or municipal building to even see the photograph, an obvious and deliberate inconvenience meant to discourage ticket challenges.

10) Taking dangerous drivers’ pictures doesn’t stop them

Ticket cameras do not apprehend seriously impaired, reckless, or otherwise dangerous drivers, or get them off of the road.