

Position of DRIVE SMART COLORADO on red light cameras

February 20, 2019

DRIVE SMART COLORADO supports the deployment of red light cameras on Colorado roads and highways, based on our concern for the protection of drivers and passengers from flagrant violators of traffic signals.

Our comments are in two broad areas, traffic safety and injury prevention.

Traffic Safety

Research by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (2017 Traffic Safety Culture Index published March, 2018) finds nearly 93 percent of drivers find it unacceptable for a driver to drive through a traffic signal that already turned red when they could have safely stopped. Drivers aged 19-24 were the most likely to consider red-light running to be acceptable.

Some claim that red light cameras are an intrusion into privacy or a violation of one's civil rights. Drive Smart Colorado points out that driving is a privilege, not a right, and it comes with the responsibility to follow traffic ordinances. The streets are for public lawful use.

Red light cameras assess a specific act, compliance or non-compliance with a traffic signal. The camera does not assess what a motorist is transporting, whether the motorist is sober, or whether the motorist is licensed to drive. It simply looks at one act of driving, compliance with red lights.

Colorado's population continues to boom, and the registration of motor vehicles grows along with the population. But given the pressure on public sector budgets, the number of police officers on patrol has not kept pace. Clearly law enforcement cannot cover dangerous intersections at all times of the day. Red light cameras are a set of fair and cost-effective eyes in dangerous intersections to help protect the community against red light running.

Injury Prevention

Red light violations that result in traffic crashes are frequently right-angle side impacts, or "T-bone" crashes. At comparable speeds, these impacts are particularly dangerous given the lower crash survivability afforded by the sides of vehicles, where only about 10 inches separate drivers and passengers from the point of impact. In contrast, as added safety factors the front and rear of modern vehicles feature deeper crush zones and are engineered to deflect key components down and away from the passenger compartment.

Side curtain airbags have been shown to mitigate serious injuries in many instances for adults, however, small children riding in vehicles involved in side-impact crashes can have far more severe injuries, as reported in "Biomechanics, A Primer For Motor Vehicle Collision Injuries" appearing in Plaintiff Magazine.

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PH.D. THESIS

BY

DR. [Name]

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According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, side impacts accounted for 24 percent of passenger vehicle occupant deaths, while rear impact crashes resulted in deaths in six percent of crashes.

Research indicates a small increase in rear-end collisions where red light cameras are incorporated, but rear-end crashes generally occur at lower speeds than side-impact collisions resulting from red light running. And again, energy absorbing crush zones in the front and rear of vehicles helps further protect vehicle occupants.

DRIVE SMART COLORADO views the integration of red light cameras as a useful means of encouraging compliance with traffic signals in dangerous intersections. The decision to implement red light cameras is best determined by local governments, based on community interests and needs.

Drive Smart Colorado
John Henry, President
Maile Gray, Executive Director