

Light, camera, ticket: City OKs pilot program to monitor intersections

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Those who make a habit of running red lights in Naperville, beware: Your days are numbered.

The City Council gave the green light last week to implement a pilot program that would bring red light enforcement cameras to the city's intersections.

The cameras are meant to keep traffic scofflaws from running red lights, thereby reducing car crashes that result from such a move. In 2006 a new law went into effect that allows local governments in Cook, DuPage, Will, Kane, Lake, Madison, McHenry and St. Clair counties to implement the technology if they so wish.

Chicago has had cameras in place since 2003, and in addition to the benefits of reducing crashes, the fines also add millions into the city's coffers each year.

According to city documents prepared by project engineer Andy Hynes, in 2006 the Naperville Police Department reported 1,286 red light citations, an increase from 1,190 in 2005. Of the 2006 red light citations issued by police, 49 involved crashes.

The statistics, along with the city's participation in the 2003 nationwide red light running study that placed a camera at the intersection of Ogden Avenue and Aurora Avenue for 61 days, were used to help make the case that placing such cameras around Naperville would help reduce crashes that resulted in injuries and reduce red light violations.

Intersections targeted

According to Hynes' memo, the city's highest concentration of both total number of crashes and those that are right angle or turning are found at intersections along those routes controlled partially by a jurisdiction other than Naperville. The intersections include those along 75th Street, overseen by DuPage County, and those along Route 59 and Ogden Avenue, controlled by the Illinois Department of Transportation.

Hynes' memo said that both DuPage County and IDOT are looking at their own guidelines for red light camera installation. The two Naperville intersections that could receive the first cameras could potentially feature a DuPage County-controlled intersection, as the county has seemed receptive to such an idea.

Otherwise, the first two cameras could either be at intersections completely under Naperville's control or one under total Naperville control and the other under DuPage County's jurisdiction.

Councilman Richard Furstenau said he wanted to see the cameras end up at the intersections with the most accidents, plain and simple.

"The fact we want to go after a couple intersections that don't have the majority of the accidents, I don't agree with," Furstenau said.

The intersection with the most right angle and turning crashes under Naperville control is at 95th Street and Book Road. Under DuPage County jurisdiction, 75th Street and Plainfield/Naperville Road has the most right angle crashes, and Interstate 88 and Route 59 has the most right angle crashes of a state-controlled intersection.

Funding concerns

Also up for debate was whether the city should lease or purchase the cameras, something Furstenau wasn't keen on. He said he didn't want "to spend this kind of money until we are allowed to go after where real accidents are happening."

His sentiments weren't shared.

"I couldn't disagree more," Councilman James Boyajian said. "There isn't an intersection in this city that couldn't benefit from this. I'm tired of us dragging our feet on this thing. We got permission to do this last May, and we're still sitting here pounding sand."

Hynes' memo said if leased, a red light camera installation on two intersection approaches could cost around \$10,000 a month, with money collected from fines helping to offset those costs. The legislation passed allows a maximum fine of \$100, with the ability for additional costs if the fine isn't paid on time.

"Our No. 1 priority is health and safety," Councilman Kenn Miller said. "This is something we can do, to start

out with minimal cost, is leasing this."

The program could expand in fiscal year 2008 to 2009 to up to 10 percent of the total number of signaled intersections within the city, for a total of 15. In future years IDOT and DuPage County routes that have Naperville connections could be equipped with cameras.

Other issues still to be worked out include the city's fine system and how tickets would be dealt with.

The tentative timeline has lease bids being solicited this spring, approval of an ordinance dealing with red light cameras this summer, and installation as soon as this summer or fall.

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