

CITY OF NAPA CITY COUNCIL  
**AGENDA REPORT**

ADMIN CALENDAR  
AGENDA ITEM 13.B.  
Date: February 15, 2011

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of City Council  
From: Richard Melton, Police Chief  
Prepared by: Jeff Troendly, Police Captain  
Subject: Red Light Camera Project Update

**ISSUE STATEMENT:**

This informational report is to update council on the Red Light Camera Program that is currently being utilized by the Police Department to reduce traffic collisions by way of changing the driving behaviors of the motoring public.

**DISCUSSION:**

Problem

Traffic complaints by the general public have always been an issue within the City of Napa. Those complaints have ranged from speeders in residential neighborhoods, persons not stopping at stop signs, DUI drivers, drivers driving with suspended drivers licenses and parking complaints to name a few. Most of these complaints have merit and have proven to be a contributor to traffic collisions. Statistical information provided by the California Office of Traffic Safety (OTS) confirms the City of Napa does have a high rate of vehicle collisions compared to other cities. Over the past decade, OTS has ranked the City of Napa to be within the top ten of comparable size cities of having a high collision rate. According to information provided by OTS, the City of Napa's OTS ranking fell out of the top ten cities with high collision rates. See Attachment 2.

Using statistics and information gathered from the public, the Police Department develops strategies and programs to have impacts on the traffic issues. Most strategies to reduce traffic collisions call for enforcement, education and engineering. By utilizing this three pronged approach, driving behaviors of the motoring public change, which generally results in a reduction of collisions.

What Has Been Done

Realizing the limited staffing in the traffic unit and its high collision rate ranking, the Police Department sought out traffic related grants to meet the demand for additional enforcement and educational efforts. These enforcement strategies and programs consisted of: DUI checkpoints, saturation patrols in high collision areas, the Click-It-or-Ticket Program, the Child Car Seat Program, Bicycle Rodeos, a Bicycle Helmet

Program, the Every 15 Minutes Program, a Radar Trailer, and Speed Feedback Signs to name a few. These programs and enforcement activities have had positive impacts. Unfortunately these programs and/or strategies can be heavily dependent upon Police personnel. Sustainability without ongoing grant funding puts these programs in jeopardy. Even with all of these programs and strategies in place, Napa still had a comparatively high collision rate.

Once again the Department tasked itself with finding programs that were effective at reducing collisions and changing driving behaviors while being sustainable within its current budget. In 2006, Sergeant Tom Pieper identified the Red Light Camera Program as a viable program that could be added to the Department's efforts of reducing collisions within the City, as well as being self-sustainable with funds generated through fines. Any additional funds beyond what was needed for the Red Light Camera Program, could be used for other traffic related programs and/or enforcement. Through his research, Sergeant Pieper learned Red Light Cameras are utilized by numerous cities across the United States and that they have been successful at reducing collisions at intersections. Research also indicated there is a possibility of reduction of collisions at non-camera intersections, as drivers began to assume most intersections had cameras, which caused a positive change in driving behavior.

Other benefits to the Red Light Camera Program are that cameras are more cost effective than utilizing Police Officers at intersections and cameras are a safer enforcement option. A camera can be placed at an intersection and is capable of running 24 hours a day, seven days a week and can capture every red light violation. Conversely, the Department does not have the staffing or the budget to place an Officer at every intersection 24 hours a day, seven days a week. If the Department did have the budget and staffing to support 24-hour enforcement at each intersection, Officers would not be able to capture and enforce every red light violation, because as they were issuing one citation for a violation observed they would have had to leave that intersection to pursue and stop the violator, thus leaving the intersection unattended. Enforcement by Officers at intersections is very dangerous, as the Officer must maneuver through traffic at higher speeds to make an enforcement stop on a violator. This maneuvering through traffic is hazardous and would be eliminated with the use of cameras, resulting in safer enforcement efforts that eliminate hazardous exposure to the Officers and the public.

In 2006, the Napa City Council recognized the benefits to the Red Light Camera Program and approved the use of cameras. Sergeant Pieper went through the RFP process to identify a vendor. In June of 2008, Redflex Traffic Systems was awarded the contract to provide red light camera services to the City of Napa. The contract requires the City to pay Redflex a flat fee of \$5,670 per month for each two lane approach intersection with a Redflex camera, and \$6,000 per month for a three lane approach intersection with a Redflex camera. Any money received in fines above these amounts would be designated to a fund for traffic enforcement and/or traffic education programs.

Sergeant Pieper and Redflex conducted preliminary intersection analysis of 12 of the top injury producing intersection within the City:

Jefferson Street @ First Street

Jefferson Street @ Second Street  
Jefferson Street @ Third Street  
Jefferson Street @ Trancas Street  
SR29 @ Trower Avenue  
SR29 @ Salvador Avenue  
SR29 @ SR121  
Soscol Avenue @ Imola Avenue  
Lincoln Avenue @ California Blvd.  
Trancas Street @ Big Ranch Road  
Trancas Street @ California Blvd.  
Trower Avenue @ Solano Avenue

Based upon the number of red light violations that resulted in injuries and/or fatalities the intersections of Jefferson St. at First St., SR29 @ SR121, Trancas St. @ Big Ranch Rd. and Soscol Ave at Imola Ave. were chosen as the first intersections to be monitored by cameras for red light violation enforcement. The first cameras were installed at Jefferson St. at First St. and Trancas St. at Big Ranch Rd. on April 29, 2009. The next sets of cameras were installed at Soscol Ave. at Imola Ave. on January 10, 2010 and at SR29 at SR121 on February 27, 2010.

When the issue of installation of red light cameras within the City of Napa became public, a downward trend of injury collisions and non-injury collisions became evident. While each intersection has varying results the overall number of injury and/or non-injury collisions is down. See Attachment 3.

The same reduction in collisions and/or injury collisions spilled over to the remaining eight intersections considered for cameras. The following represents a 2007 comparison of collision data (pre-cameras) through 2010 collision data (post-cameras) for those 8 intersections. See Attachment 4.

In 2010 the intersections with red light cameras monitored 15,276 red light violations. Of those violations monitored only 8,372 citations (55%) were issued. See Attachment 5 for an individual intersection breakdown.

Citations are not issued for every violation for many different reasons. Some of these reasons are lack of driver identification, blurred pictures of the driver or license plate and Officer discretion. Whether a citation is or is not issued, the activation of the camera at the intersection (flashing white lights) serves as good reminder to those drivers, directly and indirectly involved, to drive safely when approaching an intersection.

#### Public Issues

There have been mixed feelings regarding the use of cameras to enforce red light violations at intersections within the City of Napa by its residents. Some believe the cameras are a valuable tool in helping to protect the lives and property of motorists and pedestrians alike. Others agree that the cameras are a good tool, but the fines are too excessive especially for violators who turn right on a red light without stopping. There is another group of people who believe the only purpose behind the cameras is to generate revenue for the City. Last but not least, there is the issue of how long a yellow

light should be illuminated for straight through traffic versus traffic dedicated to a turn lane controlled by a red light.

### Red Light Cameras as an Enforcement Tool

As stated earlier in this report, camera enforcement of an intersection is more efficient and effective than utilizing an Officer(s). The cameras equate to a fraction of the cost of what it would cost to post a Police Officer at an intersection. Additionally, the camera is capable of capturing every violation whereas the Officer is only capable of capturing a limited number. Based upon current data, the red light cameras appear to have a significant impact on reducing accidents and/or reducing injuries related to intersection collisions. In the event a person does commit a violation of running a red light and that person believes there is a justifiable reason, that person has the option of presenting their case before a judge, where the magistrate has the ability to negate the ticket or find the ticket is warranted and impose a fine.

### Excessive Fines

One of the biggest complaints about the Red Light Camera Program is not the cameras themselves, but the amount of the fine associated with the violation of running the red light. The fine is currently set by the State of California at \$465.00, of which approximately \$154.84 comes back to the City and the remainder of the fine goes to the County and State. See Attachment 6 for the overall breakdown of the fine allocation.

Realizing the public's sentiment about how expensive the red light violation fine is, City Staff looked into utilizing a Municipal Code to cite for the violation as opposed to a California Vehicle Code. By using a Municipal Code, the City could establish a more reasonable fine amount for a red light violation as opposed to using expensive State mandated fine amounts for Vehicle Code violations. Other cities within the State used Municipal Codes for several reasons:

1. The fine was lower compared to State mandated fines
2. The citation did not go on the violators driving record
3. 100% of the fine went to the City

This option of using a Municipal Code, in place of a State Vehicle Code, is no longer possible as the Governor signed bill SB949 in November of 2010 preventing cities from using this option. As it stands the Police Department has no other alternative but to use the California Vehicle Code, which means violators are subject to State mandated fines and fees.

### Revenue Generated

There are those who believe the sole purpose of the Red Light Camera Program is to generate revenue for the City's general fund. While it is true the cameras do have the ability to generate revenue, the main purpose of the cameras is to change driving behaviors, thus reducing collisions at red light controlled intersection. As stated earlier in this report, the Police Department only wants programs that will have an impact on the reduction of collisions. It also wants programs that have the ability to be fiscally self-

sustaining. The Red Light Camera Program generates approximately \$44,000-\$50,000 each month. Expenditures for the program average approximately \$25,000 each month. It should be noted that the Police Department has not recovered any of its full-time employee costs, as those costs are being analyzed in the Cost Allocation Plan that is currently in progress. Once the Cost Allocation Plan is complete, those costs will be subtracted from the revenue generated by the program.

The Police Department is in the process of establishing a budget to expend excess revenues for the upcoming year. The focus of the Department will be aimed at reducing vehicular speed around all schools in the City of Napa through various programs and enforcement actions.

### Timing of Yellow Lights

The topic of yellow light phasing has always been controversial as it pertains to the use of red light cameras. Since the inception of automated enforcement, there has been an abundance of accusations hurled towards municipalities, alleging that the yellow light phasings having been altered for the sake of profits. As a result of public skepticism, State Legislators stepped in and mandated that yellow light phasing be set in accordance with the CalTrans Traffic Manual.

The CalTrans Traffic Manual generally establishes the phasing of yellow lights for through traffic based on the speed limit associated with the roadway where the light is posted. However, the CalTrans Traffic Manual establishes shorter yellow light phasing for "protected" right-turn or left-turn lanes, due to the slower speeds at which a car can safely make a turn. For example, the speed limit for SR29 at SR121 is 60 M.P.H., which means the yellowing phasing for this intersection for straight through traffic is 5.4 seconds. Conversely, the yellow light phasing for the dedicated right turn at this intersection is 3.8 seconds. The reason the phasing time is lower for this turn, is that CalTrans engineers have calculated that a car cannot negotiate a right turn at 60 M.P.H., but could do so at much lower speeds, hence the lower phasing time. With respect to public opinion, Police Department staff assigned to monitor and issue citations at intersections with dedicated turn lanes apply the straight through phasing time before issuing a citation for a red light violation. By using the straight through phasing time there has been a reduction in citations issued for red light violations for persons making a turn from a dedicated turn lane.

### Recommendation

These cameras have had a positive effect upon traffic collisions at intersections and prove to be more cost effective and efficient than the utilization of Police Officers at reducing collisions at intersections. The cameras are serving the intended purpose of reducing collisions, while sustaining themselves financially. It appears all of the Police Department's programs and enforcement efforts are having a positive outcome of reducing collisions, therefore, we should not alter current strategies or programs. The Police Department understands the negative impact of receiving a red light citation. We also see a greater benefit of utilizing the Red Light Camera Program to reduce the number of serious collisions that could result in significant injury and/or loss of life. A high collision rate (within a geographical location) not only impacts those drivers

involved in collisions, it also impacts all local residents who drive as their auto insurance premium is based upon this collision rate. Insurance companies use the criteria of frequency of collisions (within a geographical location) and the cost of repair to establish auto insurance premiums. By lowering the City of Napa collision rate, local residents should realize a lower auto insurance premium.

It is the recommendation of the Police Department to continue the use of red light cameras at intersections within the city limits of Napa.

**FINANCIAL IMPACTS:**

None

**CEQA:**

The Chief of Police has determined the Recommended Action described in the Agenda Report is not subject to CEQA, pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15060(c).

**DOCUMENTS ATTACHED:**

- Attachment 1: Power Point Presentation
- Attachment 2: City of Napa Rankings
- Attachment 3: Multi-Year Comparison at Four Intersections with Cameras
- Attachment 4: Multi-Year Comparison at Eight Intersections without Cameras
- Attachment 5: Number of Violations at Four Intersections with Cameras
- Attachment 6: Fine Allocation

**NOTIFICATION:**

None

**RECOMMENDED ACTION:**

No formal action necessary.

N/A