

# S A F E T Y F O C U S

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## *Spotlight on Charlotte, North Carolina* **Charlotte's SafeLight Program: Public Awareness is Key**

How does Charlotte, North Carolina, promote *SafeLight*, its campaign to stop red light running? A better question might be, What *don't* they do to promote it? Details of *SafeLight* are broadcast on billboards, bumper stickers and bookmarks. The program is publicized on posters, in English and Spanish brochures, and in lesson plans for driver education instructors.



*SafeLight* is featured in television and radio spots, press releases, a coloring book, and a comprehensive website at <http://www.ci.charlotte.nc.us/citransportation/programs/safelight.htm>.

Intensive branding efforts and an extensive marketing program have been crucial to the program's success, said Clement Gibson, Special Programs Manager for the Charlotte Department of Transportation, which oversees the program.

### **Public Perceptions**

A July 2001 survey by MarketWise, Inc., for the Charlotte Transportation Department, found that most people learned about the *SafeLight* program through television news, newspaper articles, cameras and signs. One third of respondents agreed that the program has changed their driving behavior.

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*The following op-ed appeared in The Philadelphia Inquirer, June 21, 2002, and is reprinted with the permission of the author.*

## **Use cameras to help curb drivers who run red lights**

By Sen. Stewart J. Greenleaf

Stop or go? The light has just turned red and the question flits across the brain. A quick glance: no police? OK—go!

Faced with that split-second decision, hundreds of thousands of drivers each year opt to hit the gas and run the red light. It's a serious gamble, often with deadly results. In 2000, running red lights caused 106,000 crashes, 89,000 injuries and more than 1,000 fatalities.

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## **Charlotte's SafeLight Program**

According to the survey, 98% of residents are aware of the program, and 84% believe the SafeLight program is beneficial to the community and has helped to reduce red-light running. Statistics for the first three years of operation show that the public perception is correct. Crashes caused by red light runners dropped 37% at SafeLight intersections and crash severity was reduced by 16%.

The city has found that safety benefits extend beyond the red light camera intersections. As of October 2001, data showed a 9% drop in red light running at all intersections since Charlotte began the SafeLight program.

For more information on the Charlotte SafeLight program, please contact Clement Gibson, 704-336-4905 or [cgibson@ci.charlotte.nc.us](mailto:cgibson@ci.charlotte.nc.us).

### *Upcoming Events*

#### **Get Ready for Stop on Red Week**

Mark your calendars and start planning now for 2002's Stop on Red Week (September 7-13, 2002). National Stop on Red Week, sponsored by the FHWA, is a week dedicated to educating Americans about the dangers of running red lights. This is a strong opportunity to publicize the issue in your area.

National Stop on Red Week takes place during the first full week of September every year, going from Saturday to Friday.

The National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running is planning a number of regional kick-offs as well as a national kick-off in St. Louis at the Annual Conference of the National Association of Governors' Highway Safety Representatives on September 9. More details will follow in next month's newsletter.

For more information on Stop on Red Week or for ideas on activities to hold in your community, please visit [http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safety/fourthlevel/pro\\_res\\_srlr\\_week.htm](http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/safety/fourthlevel/pro_res_srlr_week.htm) or call The National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running at 202-828-9100.

News summaries from across the nation

## **Red light running toll continues**

### **Ticketing Goes Digital in Howard County; Technology: A Columbia intersection becomes the first in the state equipped with a new digital red light camera**

June 25, 2002 *The Baltimore Sun*

Howard County, Maryland installed its first new digital red light camera to catch red light runners. The county has ordered three more digital cameras, and Harford County plans to install six digital cameras starting in September.

Digital cameras will expedite the citation process by transmitting digital images of suspected violators over a dedicated telecommunications line accessible only by police directly to a processing center where they can be immediately analyzed instead of taking photographs that need to be developed and scanned into a computer.

With the new cameras, violators will receive citations by mail within two weeks.

These new cameras will supplement Howard County's 24 standard film cameras, and tickets from both include a \$75 citation with no insurance points deducted. In contrast, red light runners caught by police officers can be fined up to \$500 and lose anywhere from two to eight insurance points.

### **School Bus Driver Runs Red Light, Hits Van, CHP Reports**

June 15, 2002 *San Diego Union-Tribune*

California Highway Patrol accident investigators say a San Marcos Unified School District bus driven by Colleen Wilson, 51, collided with a van in an intersection after Wilson ran a red light.

The van's driver, Jacob Rodrigues, 65, had entered the intersection legally on a green light. Rodrigues and a 4 or 5-year-old girl who was on the bus were taken to a hospital, treated for minor injuries and released.

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## **Sen. Greenleaf's op-ed**

Pennsylvania had an estimated 7,480 red-light crashes. Here, 38 people were killed and 9,000 injured, including 53 pedestrians.

Red-light running, the leading cause of urban automobile crashes, is a plague on cities. It endangers suburban and rural communities, too, where signalized intersections are often far apart and cars build up speed between stops. The likelihood of injury is higher with red-light running than any other cause of collision.

And the problem is getting worse. From 1992 to 1998, the number of fatal crashes at intersections jumped 19 percent nationally, with red-light running being the single most frequent cause - more than three times the rate of increase for all other fatal crashes during the same period. The trend took another huge leap in 2000, increasing almost 10 percent over the previous year.

More than half of those deaths were innocent occupants in other vehicles and pedestrians, most frequently children and the elderly. In addition to the loss of life and health, the financial cost is estimated to be as much as \$7 billion a year.

The American public is deeply concerned with the recent rise in red-light running. According to the Federal Highway Administration, 96 percent of drivers fear they will get hit by a red-light runner when they enter an intersection.

Yet, amazingly, 55.8 percent of Americans admit to running red lights. The leading excuse given for red light running is simply "being in a hurry".

This sense of entitlement –my time is more valuable than your safety –combined with a low expectation of being caught is responsible for rampant disrespect for the rules of the road and an upward trend in all forms of aggressive driving, not only red-light running. However, the problem of red-light running isn't easily addressed by the traditional law enforcement techniques of observation, chase, and citation, which can

be difficult and dangerous and require a tremendous amount of police manpower. The most effective countermeasure available appears to be a combination of education, enforcement, and red-light cameras, which can capture and process a violation without a dangerous pursuit.

Red-light camera technology, a proven method of increasing intersection safety, is one of the most promising solutions to the dangers of red-light runners. This technology has yielded undeniable proof of its effectiveness. In Washington, red-light-running fatalities were reduced from 16 to two in the first two years of photo enforcement, which began in late 1999.

Red-light cameras are only triggered when a car violates the light. The rear of the car is photographed, and a citation is sent to the registered owner, who can request abatement if he was not the driver. No points are assessed and insurance rates are not affected. Courts have repeatedly ruled that photo enforcement does not violate any civil liberties, although opponents contend their "rights" are more important than the safety of others.

Aggressive driving is not a right and red-light cameras present no threat to safe drivers. But, behavioral change requires consistent enforcement. Photo enforcement can reverse the trend toward this irresponsible behavior. The Senate Transportation Committee has voted favorably on a bill that would permit it.

Now, it is time for the full state Senate to swiftly pass this legislation and send it to the House of Representatives, where companion legislation has been languishing. We should make this life-saving tool available without delay.

*Stewart J. Greenleaf, a Republican representing Montgomery and Bucks counties, is the sponsor of Pennsylvania Senate Bill 704 that would permit fines to be issued to the owners of vehicles captured on camera driving through red lights.*

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## **Red light running News**

### **Official refuses to dismiss charges in fatal crash; Attorney argues that intentionally running a red light is not a crime**

June 6, 2002 *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*

Waukesha County Court Commissioner Laura Lau declined to dismiss charges against a truck driver whose attorney argued that intentionally running a red light and causing a fatal crash is not a criminal offense. Attorney Robert Le Bell argued that his client, Thomas Tsoupeis, 37, should face no more than non-criminal traffic tickets after Tsoupeis intentionally ran a red light to avoid dumping the concrete in his overloaded 75,000- pound truck. Tsoupeis allegedly sounded his horn and drove through the light, hitting a minivan, killing its driver and critically injuring the minivan's passenger.

Le Bell claimed charges of homicide by negligent operation of a vehicle and causing great bodily harm by reckless driving should be dropped since other court rulings have stated running a red light does not necessarily rise to criminal negligence. The court denied Le Bell's motion to dismiss the case and scheduled a preliminary hearing next month.

### **Motorists Plead Their Cases**

June 23, 2002 *The Greensboro News & Record*

The article describes the different appeal processes for red light running violation cases in the five cities in North Carolina that have red light cameras. In High Point, 55 percent of the 821 people who appealed their red light fines were successful in getting their citations dismissed. High Point "adjudication officers," as the people who hear red light camera ticket appeals are called, say the high rate of success for appeals in their city is due to their use of increased discretion when hearing cases.

The North Carolina legislature has given cities the freedom to decide who will hear appeals as long as the person chosen is impartial and knowledgeable of the laws. High Point, Wilmington and Fayetteville employ university professors as adjudication officers. Charlotte employs a retired CIA worker, a retired IBM employee and a retired teacher, and Greensboro employs five lawyers to hear appeals. The rate of people winning appeals in Wilmington, Fayetteville, Charlotte and Greensboro are 19 percent, 17 percent, 17 percent, and 24 percent, respectively. Drivers who run red lights are fined \$50 and given 21 days to pay or appeal the fine. The money collected from tickets is split between the city and the vendor, with the majority of each city's portion going to pay the adjudication officers.

### **Our Opinions: For Safer Roads, Pull Out All Stops**

June 27, 2002 *The Atlanta Journal Constitution*

The editorial highlights the dangers of Georgia roads and Governor Roy Barnes' new program to combat aggressive driving in Georgia. HEAT- Highway Enforcement of Aggressive Traffic- is a 24 vehicle police squad targeting aggressive driving, DUI, and speeding in the metro area.

Governor Barnes recognizes the problem in Georgia and is supportive of increased police presence on the roads, lower speed limits, and traffic enforcement technology including red light cameras. Barnes mentions that a few members of the Georgia General Assembly are standing in the way of increased safety on the roads by refusing to support programs increasing DUI and traffic enforcement. Those legislators refused to raise the driving age last year and close a DUI loophole enabling repeat offenders to avoid automatic license suspension by refusing to take sobriety tests this year.

Higher police presence on Georgia roads serves as a reminder that speeding is not tolerated, and the increased use of traffic monitoring technology helps to supplement this enforcement. Barnes answers those in the General Assembly who oppose red light cameras on privacy grounds by countering, "There is no constitutional right to take a life because of recklessness in an automobile. If you want to be private, don't drive an automobile."

The editorial concludes by asking the state and General Assembly to commit to safer roads and the use of automated traffic enforcement technology to catch offenders.

# Spotlight on TEA-21

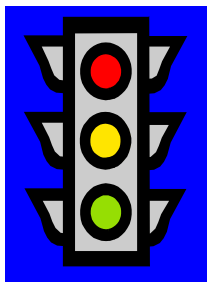
On Thursday, June 27 the Highways and Transit Subcommittee of the U.S. House of Representatives House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee held a hearing on highway safety in preparation for its work on the Transportation Equity Act for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century (TEA-21), the multi-billion dollar transportation bill that will be reauthorized next year.

At the hearing, Congressman Bob Borski (D-PA), ranking member of the subcommittee, asked a question regarding the effectiveness of red light camera enforcement programs. Bud Wright, Executive Director of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) responded by saying that the FHWA has developed a very successful intersection safety program. He stated that intersection safety is a very important issue and is an emerging issue of concern in traffic safety – in particular the problem of red light running. Wright added that automated enforcement should be done in conjunction with an engineering analysis. He stressed that when red light cameras programs are implemented correctly, they are extremely effective. Wright cited the success of the program in Oxnard, California and the positive spillover effects that have resulted.

Dr. Jeff Runge, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), said the red light running automated enforcement issue has been studied extensively by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. He said drivers should have a right to travel through an intersection on a green light and not be hit by someone who is going through a red light.

As the U.S. Congress begins to focus on the reauthorization of TEA-21, we will be watching this issue closely and informing you on future comments and debates on the issue of red light running.

## Recent Events



The National Campaign to Stop Red Light Running exhibited at Lifesavers 20 in Orlando, Florida (June 9-11). The Lifesavers Conference is a national highway safety meeting dedicated to reducing the tragic toll of deaths and injuries on our nation's roadways with attendance by nearly 1,600 participants. Our booth garnered interest from conference attendees from throughout the country.

The Campaign signed up almost 200 new members to help stop red light running and support the use of red light cameras in localities nationwide. We thank everyone who stopped by and look forward to working with all of our new members. We also hope that Lifesavers will include a mini-track or full track on red light running issues in the future.

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# Legislative Update

**New York** Assembly Bill 7266a would increase the number of intersections where traffic-control signal photomonitoring devices may be installed and operated in New York City. This bill is pending in the Assembly Transportation Committee. Several other bills are pending but less likely to pass this year.

The **Pennsylvania** Senate Transportation Committee voted 9-5 in favor of Senate Bill 704 to authorize the use of red light photo enforcement cameras at high risk intersections in Pennsylvania. The House Appropriations Committee amended SB 238 to include a red light photo enforcement pilot program in Philadelphia through 2005. The bill passed the full House 174-23, but the House and Senate could not resolve their differences on the bill prior to recessing for the summer last week. The issue will be taken up again in the fall when the General Assembly reconvenes. All other red light running bills are still pending in the House and Senate Transportation Committees.

*The legislative update portion of the newsletter is a synopsis of recent bills pertaining to automated enforcement. For a more comprehensive list, please see Advocates for Highway and Auto Safety's webpage at [www.saferoads.org](http://www.saferoads.org).*

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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Suite 700, 1501 M St. NW  
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We'd love to hear your comments or story ideas, and we'd be happy to provide more information on the Campaign. We can be reached at 202-828-9100 or [bplevelich@blakey-agnew.com](mailto:bplevelich@blakey-agnew.com). Or visit us on the web at [www.stopedlightrunning.com](http://www.stopedlightrunning.com).