

**Statement before the Maryland
House of Delegates, Environmental
Matters Committee**

Automated Speed Enforcement

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The Insurance Institute for Highway Safety is a nonprofit research and communications organization that identifies ways to reduce the deaths, injuries, and property damage on our nation's highways. We are supported by the nation's automobile insurers. The Institute is submitting research results showing the benefits of automated enforcement technology in reducing speeding on high-risk roads.

New Ways Needed to Reduce Speeding on High-Risk Roads

The perception of the risk of getting a speeding ticket strongly influences motorists' speed choices. Traditional police enforcement can be an effective method of apprehending motorists who travel at excessive speeds. But the number of drivers and vehicle miles traveled have risen faster than the availability of officers whose routine duties include traffic law enforcement.¹ Other police priorities such as apprehension of violent criminals and, more recently, anti-terrorism efforts can limit resources available for traffic enforcement. In addition, on multilane roads with heavy traffic moving in both directions it often is dangerous for police to make traditional traffic stops.

Speeding Poses Multiple Risks to All Road Users

Speeding is one of the most prevalent factors contributing to motor vehicle crashes.² It contributes to both crash frequency and severity.³ Speed increases frequency because at higher speeds motorists have less time to react and stopping distances are longer. Even more important is that the probability of severe injury in crashes increases sharply with the impact speeds of the vehicles, reflecting the laws of physics. The risk to pedestrians — the most vulnerable of road users — is even greater when speed limits are violated.⁴ The risk of pedestrian death increases by a factor of 2.5 when the driving speed of a striking vehicle increases from 25 to 31 mph.⁵ Urban areas are a prime candidate for effective speed enforcement because, on a national basis, approximately 26 percent of all crashes occur on streets with speed limits of 30 mph or less.⁶

How to Reduce Speeding on High-Risk Roads

The challenge is to find better methods of controlling speeds, and speed cameras can help. They photograph motor vehicles going a specified amount above the posted speed limit, and violators are ticketed by mail. Camera systems typically consist of a radar unit to measure speeds and a camera to photograph the vehicles that are violating the speed limit. The time, date, location, and speed of the vehicle are recorded on the film. And to increase the deterrent value, prominently posted signs should be used to alert motorists that cameras are being used.

Research from British Columbia demonstrates that this method of speed control is effective. Evaluating a program that involved 30 cameras, researchers found a 7 percent decline in crashes and up to 20 percent fewer deaths the first year cameras were used. The proportion of speeding vehicles at camera sites declined from 66 percent in 1996 to fewer than 40 percent a year later.^{3,7} Researchers also attributed a 10 percent decline in daytime injuries to speed cameras. And although nearly 250,000 tickets have been issued, public support remains relatively high. Nearly two-thirds of those surveyed in British Columbia said they favor the program.

There are other examples of the successful use of speed cameras:

- Victoria, Australia, launched a speed camera program in 1989. A little more than a year later, 54 cameras were operating. The frequency of crashes involving injuries or deaths decreased by about 30 percent.³
- On a stretch of Autobahn A3 between Cologne and Frankfurt, Germany, where speed cameras were deployed, total crashes dropped from about 300 per year to fewer than 30. Injury crashes decreased by a factor of 20.³
- Speed cameras were deployed on 64 roads in Norway, producing an overall 20 percent reduction in injury crashes compared with before the program. The largest reduction was 26 percent, and the smallest was 5 percent.³

About 75 countries rely on cameras to enforce speed limits, especially on high-risk roads. But this technology is used in only about a dozen U.S. communities. Last year, the Institute evaluated the effect of a city-wide speed camera program begun in 2001 by the District of Columbia. The program involved moving 5 vehicles equipped with cameras among 60 enforcement zones throughout the city. Institute researchers measured travel speeds on 7 neighborhood streets before cameras were deployed and again at the same sites 6 months after deployment. At all of the sites, the proportion of motorists going fast enough to warrant getting a ticket (more than 10 mph above the speed limit) went down. Reductions ranged from 38 to 89 percent. Institute researchers also measured travel speeds in Baltimore, Maryland, a comparable city that does not use speed cameras. At the same time D.C. was experiencing a decrease in travel speeds because of the speed camera enforcement program, the proportion of motorists going more than 10 mph above the speed limit at 8 sites in Baltimore stayed about the same or increased slightly.⁸

One reason cameras are not used more in this country is that many elected officials believe there is an absence of public support. Concerns have been expressed about privacy, with op-

ponents invoking the “big brother” issue. However, a nationwide telephone survey conducted in 1995 found that 57 percent of U.S. residents favor using cameras to enforce speed limit laws, and such laws have attracted strong public support in countries where they have been used. A recent Institute survey in Washington, D.C., after the speed camera enforcement program began, found a majority (51 percent) supported the enforcement program and only a third of respondents opposed it.⁹ Allowing the use of speed cameras on high-risk roads in Maryland can help state and local police enforce speed limits more effectively.

References

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