

**Statement before the Maryland
House of Delegates, Commerce
and Government 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 on multilane roads with heavy traffic moving in both directions, it often is dangerous for police to make traditional traffic stops. And if an officer can safely pull a violator off to the side of the road, a potentially hazardous distraction is created as other drivers going in both directions slow down momentarily, causing a ripple effect in the traffic.

How to Reduce Speeding on High-Risk Roads

The challenge is to find better methods of controlling speeds on these and other high-risk roads, and speed cameras can help accomplish this. 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 involves 30 cameras, researchers found a 7 percent decline in crashes and up to 20 percent fewer deaths the first year the 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.¹⁻² Researchers also attribute a 10 percent decline in daytime injuries to the 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.

And there are other examples of the successful use of speed cameras:

- Victoria, Australia, launched a speed camera program in 1989, and a little more than a year later 54 cameras were operating. The frequency of crashes involving injuries or deaths decreased by about 30 percent.²

- 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 20.²
- 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.²

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. 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 opponents 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. Allowing the use of speed cameras on high-risk roads in Maryland can assist the state and local police in more effectively enforcing speed limits.

References

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2. Transportation Research Board. 1998. Special report 254: managing speed. Washington, DC: Transportation Research Board.