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Subject: Understanding Yellow Light Phasing

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 phasing's having been altered for the sake of profits. In part, as the result of public skepticism, State Legislators finally stepped in and mandated that Table 4D-102 of the CalTrans manual be followed per 21455.7 CVC.

Currently, most jurisdictions are, in my opinion, in compliance with the law. However, some have chosen to interpret current law differently than others. There is a growing consensus who believe that protected left and right turns are exempt from following the below chart. (Protected turns are turns controlled by an arrow). The purpose of this commentary is to challenge this interpretation. But to truly understand 21455.7 CVC, it is important to first examine its historic growth.

Early on, there were no laws governing yellow light phasing. Traffic engineers relied upon minimum yellow time recommendations set forth in Table 4D-102 in the traffic manual published by Caltrans as follows:

POSTED SPEED or PRIMA FACIE SPEED		MINIMUM YELLOW INTERVAL
mph	km/h	Seconds
25 or less	40 or less	3.0
30	48	3.2
35	56	3.6
40	64	3.9
45	72	4.3
50	80	4.7
55	89	5.0
60	97	5.4
65	105	5.8

