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Drivers can disregard red-light camera tickets in L.A.

City officials debating the future of the photo-enforcement system recommend that citations stop being issued at the end of the month and that the program be phased out.



A red-light camera is posted at La Brea Avenue and Santa Monica Boulevard. Critics say the photo enforcement program is flawed because the vast majority of the 180,000-plus camera-issued tickets since 2004 have been for illegal right-hand turns. (Glenn Koenig / Los Angeles Times)



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Los Angeles' red-light camera debate rolls on



By Ari Bloomekatz, Los Angeles Times
July 26, 2011

Motorists who get tickets under the city's controversial red-light camera program can shrug them off, Los Angeles officials agreed Monday.

That was one of the few points of consensus to emerge from a three-hour City Council committee hearing on the future of the much-debated photo enforcement system. The session ended with a recommendation to stop issuing citations at the end of the month and "phase out" the program.

Richard M. Tefank, executive director of the city's Board of

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L.A. Council gridlocked on red-light cameras



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Interactive graphic: How red light video cameras work

Police Commissioners, told the Budget and Finance Committee that the tickets are part of a "voluntary payment program" without sanctions for those who fail to submit fines.

"The consequence is somebody calling you from one of these collection agencies and saying 'pay up.' And that's it," said committee member and Councilman Bill Rosendahl. "There's no real penalty in terms of your driver's license or any other consequences if you don't pay."

The five-member committee recommended that the full City Council endorse an earlier decision by the Los Angeles Police Commission to terminate the camera program at the end of the month.

The committee also recommended that city agencies work to resolve issues with the system contractor, American Traffic Solutions, including removing equipment from 32 intersections and attempting to collect on about 65,000 outstanding tickets. Officials said it was unclear how long it

could take to completely end the program.

About 45,000 citations are issued annually with a collection rate of about 60%, according to a report from the city's chief legislative analyst. But that collection rate could fall drastically as more motorists realize the current penalty collection program lacks teeth, officials said.

Whether the full City Council will go along with the recommendation remains unclear. The City Council previously deadlocked over the fate of the program after the Police Commission voted to kill the program in June.

That decision put Los Angeles in the center of a national debate over the effectiveness of the cameras. Many major cities, including Anaheim, and smaller areas such as Loma Linda have banned them.

An audit by City Controller Wendy Greuel last year found that the cameras cost the city more than it receives in revenue, and that the program has not "conclusively shown to have increased public safety."

Critics of the cameras also say the program is flawed because the vast majority of the 180,000-plus camera-issued tickets since 2004 have been for illegal right-hand turns. But advocates say the cameras pay for themselves and the LAPD says they have improved safety.

Another council committee — Audits and Governmental Efficiency — is scheduled to take up the issue Tuesday. The full City Council could reconsider the matter as early as Wednesday.

If the council accepts the recommendation from the budget committee, the last camera-issued ticket in Los Angeles would be July 31.

ari.bloomekatz@latimes.com

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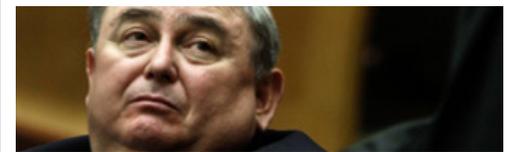
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MaskedMarvyl at 7:11 PM July 26, 2011

"Critics of the cameras also say the program is flawed because the vast majority of the 180,000-plus camera-issued tickets since 2004 have been for illegal right-hand turns. But advocates say the cameras pay for themselves and the LAPD says they have improved safety" I was one of those given a \$500 ticket for making a right-hand turn. As for "improving safety", I have heard squealing tires and a horrible crash more than once at an intersection because people terrified of getting a huge ticket slam on their brakes and are rear-ended. Now THAT'S improving safety! And of course there are the companies that program the cameras that got nailed for fixing them so they take the picture before the light even turned red. There's nothing wrong with the idea! Just make the fines reasonable so people don't cause accidents stopping, make them linked to your license renewal so you have to pay, and make sure they are run fairly and accurately. But of course, that would be the "reasonable" solution, so never mind.....

3GCANAT at 6:43 PM July 26, 2011

Mr. Tefank's "voluntary payment program" is a unique insanity only found in LA. The same insanity that equipped 32 intersections with cameras at taxpayer's expense before the legal issues were identified and quieted. Was it not possible to equip, say, 2 busy intersections with cameras to run the legal issues through the courts? But of course the politicians and bureaucrats weren't spending their own money, now were they? Like I said LA has a unique form of insanity...unfortunately, like Alzheimer's, it's fatal.

xojimi at 6:34 PM July 26, 2011

How about the STOP SIGN camera tickets issued by the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority (MRCA) like the ones in Franklin Canyon Park, do those fall in the same contract category? By the way...councilman Bill Rosendahl doesn't care much about credit reports, right? just a collection agency call if you don't pay.

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