

The Baytown Sun

Seeing red

By Luke Hales

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We have all been there. As we travel this city's streets, whether making our way to our jobs, running errands, or taking our children to school, we will take our place at a stoplight, awaiting the green signal and our chance to continue forward. As the light changes and we inch forward, seemingly out of nowhere a driver will careen through the intersection at a dangerous rate of speed, hoping to 'beat' the system by endangering those around them.

Today, Baytown's City Council will consider locations for these cameras around town, paying special attention to notorious intersections where motorists have a habit of treating red lights as suggestions. With six traffic fatalities this year, two of which were directly related to drivers running a traffic stop, a 'green-light' for this initiative would make a difference city-wide.

Statistics show that drivers running red lights cause nearly a quarter of all traffic accidents. This may seem insignificant, until one considers the costs; annually, 800 deaths, 200,000 injuries and \$7 billion in property damage are tied to this phenomenon. Cities that adopt this technology show dramatic decreases in these numbers once the cameras—and the fines they accumulate—are in place. Further, this solution will not cost taxpayers or the Baytown any money upfront; rather, the cost will be paid through the fines assessed to each violation. Given these facts, there is hardly an argument against a program that can not only save lives but also keep the streets safer.

Red light cameras would also be a boon for our city's patrol officers, who are currently the primary deterrent for traffic violators. Every traffic stop takes an officer out of the patrol process; with the limited number of officers on the street, this system would free them to pursue more serious offenses in town, in effect reducing major crime and making this city more secure for its citizens.

Some will protest a loss of personal freedom, a fear of "Big Brother" watching our movements, or an abuse of authority in the creation of the red-light system. Yet this is not a method of monitoring every movement of the populace; it is meant to specifically target offenders who show disregard for the laws set in place to protect all who use the city's roadways, including the violators. Further, this system has benefits for all who use the roadway; insurance rates will potentially decrease, first responders will have fewer trauma patients to treat, and there will be far less unnecessary death on Baytown's roads.

As a nation, we love our cars. For many, the type of vehicle they drive makes up a

large portion of their self-identity. But with the privilege of driving comes the inherent responsibility to drive safely. We encourage the City Council to approve this red light camera system for the benefit of all who travel our roadways.

Editorial written by Luke Hales, city editor, on behalf of the newspaper's editorial board.

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