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## City: Hit brakes, or say 'cheese'

### Jackson approves plan for cameras to help catch drivers who run red lights

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The city of Jackson wants to teach drivers that yellow means slow down, not speed up.

To do this, the city plans to have cameras installed that will photograph anyone running a red light at certain intersections.

The City Council on Tuesday approved an agreement with Arizona-based American Traffic Solutions LLC to implement the system. The images will be used as evidence of traffic violations and will authorize the Jackson Police Department to issue civil citations and warning notices to violators.

The system will be paid for through the fines collected from violators. Several other cities in the state, including Hattiesburg, Tupelo, Southaven and Columbus, are trying to implement similar systems.

Studies show red-light cameras affect driver behavior, said Josh Weiss, spokesman from ATS, which has operated these systems for more than a decade. Communities generally experience a 40 to 60 percent reduction in the number of violations at intersections, he said.

"When you reduce violations, you also see a dramatic reduction in the number of crashes," Weiss said.

Ward 3 City Councilman Kenneth Stokes voted against the contract because he said he wanted more information.

"I support the idea of trying to stop people from running red lights," Stokes said. "... But I don't think this company is the way to solve the problem."

Said assistant Police Chief Lee Vance: "This is a very efficient way to do traffic control, especially at a time when we're struggling with additional manpower."

But, he added, "This won't replace human traffic enforcement. It will just create an additional tool."

The intersections to get cameras have not been determined, Vance said. The public will be informed before cameras are installed, he said.

"We are not trying to trap anybody," Vance said.

The city already has cameras that monitor intersections throughout the city 24 hours a day, but they do not take photographs as people run lights.

In Hattiesburg, two companies have made presentations to the City Council, but a contract has not come to a vote, said Police Department spokeswoman LaShana Orrell.

Tupelo Mayor Ed Neelly said he, too, is convinced the cameras will improve safety and hopes the Mississippi Department of Transportation gives his city permission to put cameras at the intersection of Mississippi 6 and Mississippi 145.

However, municipalities are facing opposition from some state lawmakers. Rep. Earle Banks, D-Jackson, and Rep. Mark Duvall, D-Mantachi, have bills before the Legislature that would prohibit such cameras.

Duvall likened the use of the cameras to "entrapment." He lamented that the systems shift the focus of violations onto whomever the vehicle is registered to rather than the driver.

Banks worries about police officers being taken out of the picture when it comes to many traffic violations.

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