

LOS ANGELES COUNTY
RED LIGHT PHOTO
ENFORCEMENT PILOT PROGRAM

Institute for Court Management
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Phase III Project
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ABSTRACT

On September 15, 1998, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors together with the Department of Public Works, the Chief Administrators' Office and California Highway Patrol developed a program to decrease red-light running in Los Angeles County. Together these agencies implemented a Red Light Photo Enforcement Pilot Program at four intersections in the County of Los Angeles. Two of these four intersections targeted are in the Citrus Judicial District.

The goal of the Pilot Program is to increase traffic safety by reducing accidents caused by red light violations. Accidents caused by red light violations are among the most serious and often result in severe injuries and fatalities. Four intersections that have had 10 or more accidents resulting from red light violations in the past three years were chosen for the program. The objectives of the program were simple; reduce collisions at dangerous intersections, reduce police costs by performing the work of traffic officers, and use any revenue generated to off-set costs for the program. Ideally, revenues would pay for the program entirely. It would also provide additional means for the California Highway Patrol to enforce red light violations more effectively.

Filing projections of 10 citations per day, per intersection would increase filing in the Traffic Department by 17%. The fines collected from paid citations would offset the program costs. By tracking the monthly filings, revenue collection and disposition rate, we found that over the first six months of the program the figures were dramatically less than the projected estimates. A total of 276 citations were actually filed with the court and 23 have been paid, 37 have been dismissed due to driver identification issues, 28 have failed to appear and the remaining citations have not yet reached their appearance date. Three cases have been set for court trial.

Six months into the program, the two Citrus intersections alone have cost the County an estimated amount of \$67,200. The revenue generated from the two intersections from collections to cover the program cost is far less than anticipated at \$3057. Even if all remaining 188 citations resulted in convictions and payment and using the analysis rate of \$132.00 each, this would still only generate an additional \$24,816. Again, not enough to cover the costs of the program.

The remaining intersections in the program monitored, violations recorded and citations issued have met or exceeded expectations. After reviewing the figures, The Department of Public Works chose to relocate the cameras installed in the intersections that were not producing projected results. Both cameras in the Citrus Jurisdiction are to be relocated as soon as new locations are chosen.

A study conducted in 1997 in Oxnard, California found that violations at camera-monitored intersections had dropped by 40 percent; interestingly, violations at non-camera intersections in Oxnard dropped even more - by 50 percent. This is considered a "halo effect". Whether or not the program is reducing violations at camera-monitored intersections in Los Angeles County is difficult to state. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, it takes a minimum of one year to produce statistically significant crash data. Generally, experts insist on a three-year sampling period.

In retrospect, the fact that filings were slow during the first months has given the traffic department time to adjust to the new procedure, become familiar with the citations and work out technological issues. Even with minimal impact from the program, there were several procedural issues that had to be overcome.

There are also important operational issues that must be considered when using this device. Some items of consideration are identification and selection of operational sites and times to deal with identified traffic safety and enforcement problems; provision of equipment-specific and court procedure training programs for officers and technical support personnel to ensure the equipment is properly operated and filing of citations is handled properly.

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