

HOUSE BILL REPORT

E2SSB 5188

As Passed House:
March 2, 2012

Title: An act relating to harmonizing certain traffic control signal provisions relative to yellow change intervals, certain fine amount limitations, and certain signage and reporting requirements.

Brief Description: Harmonizing certain traffic control signal provisions relative to yellow change intervals, certain fine amount limitations, and certain signage and reporting requirements.

Sponsors: Senate Committee on Transportation (originally sponsored by Senators Becker, Haugen, Swecker, Stevens, King, Fain, Delvin, Holmquist Newbry, Honeyford and Hewitt).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/15/12, 2/20/12, 2/21/12, 2/24/12 [DP].

Floor Activity:

Passed House: 3/2/12, 96-0.

Brief Summary of Engrossed Second Substitute Bill

- Requires all stoplights to have yellow change intervals that are at least as long as those identified in the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
- Establishes requirements for local jurisdictions using automated traffic safety cameras, including conducting an analysis of proposed camera locations, posting annual reports on traffic accident rates where a camera is located, and complying with certain signage requirements.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 25 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Liias, Vice Chair; Armstrong, Ranking Minority Member; Hargrove, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Angel, Eddy, Finn, Fitzgibbon, Hansen, Jinkins, Johnson, Klippert, Kristiansen, Ladenburg, McCune, Moeller, Moscoso, Overstreet, Reykdal, Rivers, Rodne, Shea, Takko, Upthegrove and Zeiger.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Staff: Alison Hellberg (786-7152).

Background:

Under current law, local governments may use automated traffic safety cameras to detect stoplight, railroad crossing, or school speed zone violations. Use of the cameras is restricted to two-arterial intersections, railroad crossings, and school speed zones. Prior to use, the local legislative authority must adopt an ordinance allowing their use. All locations where an automated traffic safety camera is used must be clearly marked by placing signs in locations that clearly indicate to a driver that he or she is entering a zone where traffic laws are enforced by an automated traffic safety camera. The cameras may only take pictures of the vehicle and vehicle license plate while an infraction is occurring, and must not reveal the face of the driver or passengers. Infractions detected through the use of cameras are not part of the registered owner's driving record. Additionally, infractions must be processed like parking infractions, and fines issued for infractions may not exceed the amount of fines issued for other local parking infractions.

The federal Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD) defines standards to install and maintain traffic control devices on all public streets, highways, bikeways, and private roads open to public traffic. It is adopted in regulation by the Federal Highway Administration. It is considered to be both a legal and an engineering document. State law requires the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) to adopt uniform standards for traffic control devices installed along state highways. Traffic control devices on county roads must conform to these adopted standards, and those on city streets must conform to the extent possible.

Summary of Bill:

Findings are made and the Legislature's intent is declared. The Legislature finds that it is in the interest of the driving public to continue to provide for a uniform system of traffic control signals, including provisions relative to yellow light durations, fine amounts for certain traffic control signal violations, and signage and reporting requirements at certain traffic control signal locations. The Legislature further finds that a uniform system of traffic control signals greatly enhances the public's confidence in a safe and equitable highway network. Therefore, it is the intent of the Legislature to harmonize and make uniform certain legal provisions relating to traffic control signals.

All control signals (stoplights) must have yellow light change intervals that are at least as long as the minimum intervals identified in the MUTCD. If an automated traffic safety camera is used to detect stoplight violations, it must be installed on a stoplight that has a yellow change interval duration that meets the standards identified in the MUTCD, and the yellow change interval duration may not be reduced after placement of the camera. The fine issued for a stoplight violation that is detected through the use of an automated traffic safety camera may not exceed the monetary penalty for a violation of the requirement to follow official traffic control devices.

Changes are also made to the requirements for use of automated traffic safety cameras. Local legislative authorities must prepare an analysis of locations where automated traffic

safety cameras are proposed to be located before allowing for their use and before adding additional cameras or relocating any existing camera to a new location. Local jurisdictions are also required to post annual reports regarding traffic accident rates where a camera is located and the number of infractions issued for each camera. Signs indicating the location of a camera must be posted at least 30 days before activation of the camera and signs for camera locations must follow the MUTCD, as adopted by the WSDOT. Additionally, cities and counties must consider installing cameras that minimize the impact of the flash on drivers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill stems from constituent complaints about traffic safety cameras. There were concerns that tickets were at higher amounts, yellow light intervals were too short, and the public did not know when the cameras were being used. The prime sponsor met with a large stakeholder group and narrowly tailored the bill to address these public perception concerns.

This bill brings transparency and notice to the public. Traffic safety cameras are controversial, but serve an important public safety function. Both Lakewood and Tacoma have seen a decline in accidents since the cameras have been in place. Many cities are already complying with these requirements, but the bill would bring consistency.

Studies have shown that use of traffic safety cameras result in an increase in rear-end accidents, but a decrease of accidents hitting the sides of vehicles. The latter type is more dangerous. This has meant that while there is not a decrease in accidents, there is a decrease in deaths and injuries.

These cameras should only be used when there is demonstration that it would decrease injuries and deaths. Cameras need to be clearly marked and there should also be a public campaign prior to placement of the cameras. The penalty piece is important. These cameras should not be a money maker for cities. If cities are not finding that the cameras are improving safety, they should be removed.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Senator Becker, prime sponsor; Ashley Probart, Association of Washington Cities; Brianna Taylor, Cities of Tacoma and Lakewood; Steve Lind, Washington Traffic Safety Commission; and Dave Overstreet, Automobile Association of America Washington.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.