

# Ohio traffic-camera law takes enforcement to busy freeways

November 8 2015, by Mark Gillispie

---

A state law meant to effectively ban the use of traffic enforcement cameras is proving to have unintended consequences: motorists speeding along busy Ohio freeways getting a lot more tickets.

The Legislature thought it could end unpopular traffic-camera enforcement with a provision requiring a full-time officer to be present when an automated enforcement camera catches a speeder. But some communities have found a lucrative route around the rule by stationing officers with camera-equipped speed guns beside and above highways—rather than the local roadways where stationary cameras had been confined.

The communities of Youngstown and Newburgh Heights have already deployed camera-carrying officers. A third, Hubbard Township, plans to do so soon.

"We could write 1,000 tickets a day if we wanted to," said Newburgh Heights Mayor Travis Elkins. About 200 tickets have been mailed since officers in the village of about 2,100 people began using the hand-held cameras in late August, he said.

As many as 90,000 cars a day pass through the village on Interstate 77 on a normal work day, Elkins said. Using the new speed cameras on an overpass is far safer for officers compared with trying to chase down speeders in a cruiser. A village officer was struck by a drunk driver on I-77 last December, he noted.

The hand-held cameras allow officers to get keep a bead on a speeding car then snap a picture of its license plate when it gets in range. Officials in the communities using them say they've received inquiries from other departments in the state.

State Sen. Bill Seitz of Cincinnati, who views camera enforcement as a municipal cash grab, helped write the law that had been viewed as tantamount to a prohibition on [camera](#) enforcement. The Legislature couldn't enact an outright ban because of two Ohio Supreme Court decisions that said cities can use enforcement cameras.

"Technology has outstripped our ability to play whac-a-mole with these things," Seitz said in an interview with the Associated Press. "I have no idea how to combat the problem."

Communities across the country began using the hand-held cameras only in the last few years. An official with Colorado-based Laser Technology said his company's enforcement cameras are now used in 18 states, including Ohio. Camera enforcement is widely used, but not necessarily all that popular. Thirteen states prohibit the use of speed cameras.

People flocked to social media sites to criticize Youngstown for not providing enough notice about the ticketing on the freeways. City officials countered there was plenty of notice, something the new law requires, and that this isn't a cash grab but an effort to make motorists safer.

"We're not trying to hammer people," Youngstown Mayor John McNally said. "We're trying to change their behavior and get them to slow down."

The Vindicator newspaper in Youngstown is keeping tabs on ticketing. On Nov. 1, the newspaper reported that 3,600 people had been cited and 1,431 had paid their fines. The newspaper estimates that those fines

created \$116,000 in revenue for the city and \$63,000 for its vendor.

Speeding tickets generated by cameras are civil violations in Ohio and don't result in points on a driving record. Companies provide the cameras, mail the tickets and take a cut of the money collected. The new law requires the officer who is present to review images for clarity before passing them on to the vendors to process.

In Youngstown, tickets are issued to motorists driving 13 mph over the speed limit. In Newburgh Heights, it's 14 mph. The communities are required to hold administrative hearings for those who want to contest their tickets.

John McConnell of Tennessee-based Applied Technology Partners said there is a growing demand for the hand-held cameras in markets all over the world as countries move toward requiring photographic evidence and the testimony of a police officer to issue traffic citations.

"Speed management does work," McConnell said. "It does have the potential for being abused, but it has less potential if an officer is part of the equation."

Adam Earnhardt, a professor at Youngstown State University, said the city would have had easier acceptance if it hadn't created a "P.R. nightmare." He acknowledged that speeds are down along I-680.

"I drive very slowly on that stretch," Earnhardt said. "And I always look up to that stoop to see if the cop is up there with that radar gun."

© 2015 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Ohio traffic-camera law takes enforcement to busy freeways (2015, November 8) retrieved 26 April 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2015-11-ohio-traffic-camera-law-busy-freeways.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.