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Revenue Drives Red Light Cameras, Not Safety

"Revenue seems to be driving the red light camera rage," said Eric Skrum, Communications Director for the National Motorists Association. "If cities were truly concerned about intersection safety, their engineers would be applying sound engineering practices that improve compliance with traffic laws and traffic signals while reducing accidents rather than installing ticket cameras.

Skrum continued, "I find it very revealing that Lockheed Martin, one of the biggest manufacturers of red light cameras in the U.S., has included clauses in their contracts that prohibit city engineers from applying engineering practices that improve compliance and reduce accidents, apparently to maintain the flow of ticket camera revenue. Lockheed Martin specifically prohibits cities, such as San Diego, California, from changing the timing of yellow lights in intersections that host their cameras, even though increasing the yellow light time has proven to dramatically decrease red light violations.

"In Fairfax County, Virginia there has been a 96% decrease in red light violations at the intersection of US50 and Fair Ridge Drive, but only after the yellow light time was increased by 1.5 seconds. And, Lockheed Martin has asked Mesa, Arizona for approval to remove cameras from intersections that no longer generate meaningful revenue. The cause is an increase in the duration of the yellow light time at the intersections. In the typical Lockheed Martin contract, the company doesn't get paid unless a ticket is issued. At the very least, there is a definite conflict of interest due to the fact that if the intersection has no violators, Lockheed Martin has no profit.

"And, ticket cameras have definitely shown a profit. California recently raised their red light violation fines to \$271 per ticket (Lockheed Martin receives \$70 of that). Washington DC has started using photo enforcement and has stated it expects to receive \$160 million in traffic fines by 2004.

"Not only has the sheer number of tickets issued and money reaped increased, but the type of photo enforcement and surveillance the government uses has also vastly increased. There are red light cameras, speeding cameras, railroad crossing cameras, and most recently face identification cameras. Tampa Bay, Florida is now scanning the faces of pedestrians on the street to compare them to their database of criminals. The Colorado Department of Motor Vehicles is investing in a camera system that will map the face of anyone with a driver's license thus creating a photo database of the vast majority of their population. How long until the system used in Colorado is married to the system used in Florida? Raise the fines for littering, jaywalking, or any other ticketable offense and you now have another cash cow ready to be milked.

"Photo enforcement of any kind is not about safety. Cities are being caught in the trap of easy money without giving much thought to the pockets they are stealing from," concluded Skrum.

The National Motorists Association was established in 1982 to represent the interests and rights of North American motorists. It operates at the national level and through a system of state chapters. For more information about the NMA, call 608-849-6000, Email us at nma@motorists.org, or visit the NMA web site at <http://www.motorists.org>.