

City to keep hands off amber lights

PHOTORADAR IN SPEED LIMIT ENFORCEMENT

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WINNIPEG will not follow the lead of some cities where controversial red-light cameras have caused officials to lengthen or shorten amber lights.

Bob Chochinov, superintendent of traffic signals, said yesterday traffic light engineers will not lengthen the four-to-six second timing of amber lights — as has been tried in some American cities — because of red-light photo enforcement.

“We absolutely do not play with ambers,” Chochinov said.

In Mesa, Arizona, an extra second added to amber lights at some intersections reduced by almost 60 per cent the city's number of red-light camera tickets. By making an amber four seconds, the city logged just 1,468 total red-light camera citations — fewer than half the number recorded in the previous month.

Chochinov said Winnipeg has based its timing on amber lights on a national standard so that each city is the same. The timing never goes below four seconds, or above six seconds.

In Winnipeg and other Canadian cities, amber lights are timed depending on the speed limit; the lower the speed limit the shorter the amber.

If cameras show a problem with people getting caught jumping reds, the city can synchronize lights so that red lights show in all directions a few seconds before the green light shows. That would hold traffic back until the intersection is cleared. The city currently uses this technique at large intersections like Lagimodiere Boulevard and Fermor Avenue and Century Street and Ness Avenue.

Shortening amber lights is also an issue in cities with red-light cameras, but Chochinov added if Winnipeg were to shorten amber lights, it would undermine the effectiveness of red-light enforcement and open up the city for court action.

Critics of red-light “scameras” say in some jurisdictions, like in San Diego, the timing of amber lights has been shortened to about three seconds to increase the chances of more motorists getting nabbed by a red-light camera. They also say the length of the amber was shortened to increase the amount of ticket revenue going to the city and the private operator of the red-light cameras.

Winnipeg Police Service Traffic Patrol Sgt. Jon Butcher, who's leading the WPS's efforts to install red-light and photo radar cameras, said adjusting amber lights would ruin the photo enforcement program.

Butcher also said the private operator of the red-light cameras, likely an Edmonton company, will be paid a flat fee by the city to run the red-light system.

The WPS currently has one red-light camera installed at Broadway and Sherbrook Street, to study how the system works. They are now collecting data on the number of red-light jumpers, but not issuing warnings and tickets.

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— Bob Chochinov,
superintendent of
traffic signals

