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Seeing red over red-light cameras

By DOUG BEAZLEY, SUN MEDIA

City councilors are calling for an audit of maintenance logs for the city's red-light cameras following a U.S. report suggesting half the cameras in Washington D.C. don't work.

A story in the Washington Post this week says roughly half of the 50 red-light cameras in the District of Columbia have been out of service for months.

The cameras were, until this week, operated by Texas-based Affiliated Computer Systems, the same company that runs Edmonton's cameras.

"Every (paralegal) and everyone who's got one of these tickets is going to be all over us when this gets out," said Coun. Kim Krushell.

She's calling on the Edmonton Police Commission to order an immediate audit of ACS's maintenance operations.

"Our problem is liability. Obviously there's a risk that some tickets will turn out to be worthless."

"We'll have to do some sort of audit now, won't we?" said Coun. Terry Cavanagh. "We expect these cameras to prevent accidents. We have to know they're working."

The maintenance glitch in D.C. is just the latest black mark on ACS's corporate record.

The company faces charges of bribing two city cops after a lengthy RCMP investigation into the 20-year, \$90-million photo enforcement contract in Edmonton. The officers also face charges of accepting bribes.

In D.C., ACS's corporate rival, American Traffic Solutions, officially took over management of the red light cameras yesterday.

ATS reported in a memo to D.C. council members that 23 of the cameras were not working - some for as long as six months. The maintenance gap means lost revenue and a potential liability gap as motorists come forward to challenge fines.

Look for the same thing to happen in Edmonton, said Randy Semeniuk, a paralegal who runs a service for motorists fighting red-light and photo radar tickets.

"Of course you could bring the (D.C. situation) into an Edmonton court," he said.

"You could make the argument that all of Edmonton's cameras have to be reviewed before any more fines could be assessed.

"It brings the reliability of the whole red-light camera system into question."