

Smile, you're on red-light camera

Our position:

Plans to install red-light cameras put Fort Wayne in the forefront of high-tech safety advances.

Red means stop. Everybody knows this. Yet a frighteningly large number of drivers pretend they don't.

So far, however, Fort Wayne is the only Indiana city to muster the will to track these drivers down. The city has made plans to install cameras that will photograph drivers who run red lights, helping law enforcers to identify and prosecute traffic violators.

Critics call the technique an invasion of privacy that will be prone to error, an argument that led to the death of a bill in the legislature giving municipalities more authority to install the cameras.

On the contrary, a high-tech system would actually be more accurate by eliminating subjectivity behind the police officer's judgment call: Was the light still yellow, or had it turned red?

Mayor Bart Peterson has said he's considering a similar project in Indianapolis, and we encourage him to do so.

Too many drivers have developed a lax attitude toward red lights, passing through as the light changes to red or even a second or two after. Perhaps they feel reaching their destination as quickly as possible is more important than obeying traffic laws. Perhaps they don't believe their actions will have any serious consequences.

They're wrong.

According to the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, in 1997, 1,114 traffic fatalities resulted from unheeded red lights. Indiana ranks 10th of all states in red-light violation fatalities.

Red-light cameras are not, as Rep. Robert Kuzman, D-Merrillville, writes them off, "just big government," but rather an urgently needed life-saving device.

The threat of legal repercussions applied by the cameras would make any would-be red light-runner think twice before stepping on the gas; thus, accidents, if the intentional slighting of a traffic law can be called an accident, would drastically decrease.

"All we want is for people to stop at red lights," explained Fort Wayne City Councilman Tom Henry. It's really not too much to ask.