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Alief/Southwest News

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As extra red-light cams went up, tickets went down

Officials say drivers, knowing they are being watched, have changed habits

By MATT STILES

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Red-light camera citations have decreased steadily since Houston police boosted their monitoring at intersections six months ago, newly released records show.

The number of citations declined by a third, to 17,000 last month from a high of 27,000 in October — all after police added an extra 20 cameras and began fining motorists for illegal turns.

The rapid decline at the 70 camera locations is a sign, city and police officials say, that more motorists kn watched and are more cautious about getting nabbed.

"If a person is going the same route day after day, and then they get a ticket because they ran a red light to run the light," Mayor Bill White said Monday.

Overall, the cameras have nabbed more than 230,000 vehicles since they went online in September 2006

About 60 percent of those motorists have paid their fines, resulting in more than $11.5 million in revenue department has spent $4 million operating the system, including $2.7 million to its vendor, American Traf $2.1 million must be shared with the state, leaving a profit of about $5.4 million, records show.

The program has been controversial among some in the public who complain that the cameras invade the while generating revenue. City and police officials, however, say the program raises awareness of intersec also argue that automating red-light enforcement allows the understaffed police force to be more product

The shrinking figures mirror a similar trend from a six-month period last year with 50 camera locations.

Police saw a 20-percent drop in citations from May to September, to 11,700 a month from 14,800.

The following month saw a spike, though, after police began monitoring 20 alternative approaches to inte the program.

Crackdown on illegal turns

That change came as City Council, following a new state law, required police to cite motorists who turn or first stopping and yielding to cross traffic.

The result was a record number of citations in October: 27,000. Since then, the average number of montl monitored locations has also decreased, to 255 last month from 388 in October.

"If there's a decline, that pretty much says that people aren't running red lights," said Councilwoman Sue committee that oversees city transportation issues. "We're modifying people's behavior."

While the citation figures show that fewer motorists are breaking the law at monitored intersections, it rei whether the intersections actually are safer.

"The simple fact that the cameras are giving out more citations at intersections, that doesn't mean that H lawyer Paul Kubosh, a critic who unsuccessfully sued the city over the legality of the red-light camera pro

Researchers from Rice University and the Texas Transportation Institute are conducting a statistical study at the monitored sites, but it was unclear when the results will be released.

Kubosh said that study could show that minor accidents actually increased at the intersections as motoris to avoid citations — a dynamic other cities across the country have seen.

"The whole purpose of the cameras is to decrease accidents," he said. "They sold this thing on accident pı

Officers who monitor the program say the study should show that accidents have decreased, said Sgt. Da supervises the program and monitors video.

"Honestly," he said. "I've seen very few accidents."

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Ethan78566 wrote:

people have something to whine about all the time. If people know how to drive and follow the traffic rules, t be given. But if you continue to drive like you own the street, then have it your way, just like at Burger King. a cry baby.

3/27/2008 6:04 PM CDT

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djatomix wrote:

This is off topic , but the offenders need to know.
USE YOUR TURNSIGNALS!!! It's the lever on the left side
of steering column. You haven't noticed it there,before.
Now that you know , use it. I had to say it again, sorry.

3/27/2008 4:44 PM CDT

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Omega_Man wrote:

htxns wrote: It would be right in line with the lack of common sense people to drive 5 minutes out of their w red light that they can't run anymore.

5 Minutes!?!?! This is Houston baby: The land of highways and roads. I can honestly say I save time by avoi intersections. After all, they seem to favor intersections that get an awful amount of traffic.

3/27/2008 3:20 PM CDT

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12StepSteve wrote:

Why would anybody object to these cameras, unless they make a habit of running red lights?

3/27/2008 2:31 PM CDT

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