

Senate Bill 11 – Statewide Red Light Camera Act

Adoption of red light cameras slow in Pa. even though they save lives

<https://www.spotlightpa.org/news/2025/03/traffic-camera-bill-traffic-philadelphia-safety-legislature/>

By: Kate Huangpu

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HARRISBURG — All Pennsylvania municipalities would be allowed to install red light cameras aimed at making intersections safer under a proposal that will be introduced as soon as this summer.

At the moment, just Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and a handful of other places in the commonwealth are allowed to use them. But even among that group, only a few have installed cameras despite evidence the devices reduce fatal crashes.

Pittsburgh is in the process of adding cameras to its most dangerous intersections, though it's run into issues finding a vendor. Smaller municipalities struggle to meet the state's requirements to get such a program off the ground, one expert told Spotlight PA.

With many issues competing for state lawmakers' attention, it remains to be seen if expanding red light cameras will rise to the top of the agenda this session. But for supporters like Eileen Miller, the issue feels pressing.

Miller's son, Paul, was killed in a distracted driving crash in 2010, and she has spent much of her time since thinking about safe driving laws. In particular, she pushed for a bill banning the use of cell phones while operating a motor vehicle. It passed last year after more than a decade of advocacy.

Between budget negotiations and elections, Miller told Spotlight PA she only had a "short period" each year where she felt the legislature had the attention span to pass the law.

"I constantly had to be down there session after session, reminding them, emailing them," Miller told Spotlight PA. "Sometimes you have to be a bit aggressive."

Efforts to expand automatic traffic enforcement have progressed in fits and starts.

Lawmakers passed a bill creating a pilot program for red light cameras in Philadelphia more than two decades ago. A handful were installed along Roosevelt Boulevard, one of the deadliest roads in the city.

The legislature later allowed Pittsburgh and larger municipalities that meet certain standards to use the cameras.

Now, state Rep. Ed Neilson (D., Philadelphia) wants all municipalities to have the option. He plans to introduce a bill as soon as this summer, he told Spotlight PA.

That legislation would also make red light camera programs permanent. Currently, programs in Philadelphia and other commonwealth locations will expire in July 2027 unless the legislature acts.

Neilson has had success with traffic safety bills before. He sponsored a bill, which became law, that permits Philadelphia to pilot automatic speed enforcement cameras in some school zones.

The city was already allowed to use speed cameras on roads including Roosevelt Boulevard, where speeding and crashes resulting in serious or fatal injuries have declined since 2020.

The law also made permanent the use of speed cameras in highway work zones.

While these kinds of measures don't typically garner much opposition, they do hit roadblocks.

State Rep. Napoleon Nelson (D., Montgomery), chair of the Legislative Black Caucus, said he generally supports enforcement cameras. But he thinks they must include data collection provisions that ensure people of color aren't disproportionately targeted.

When lawmakers were trying to pass the bill banning cell phones while driving, a version that didn't mandate racial data collection failed after the Legislative Black Caucus opposed it.

Neilson chairs his chamber's Transportation Committee, through which the bill would need to pass before it goes to the full state House. Leaders in the state House and Senate either declined to comment on the proposal or said they would review it once it is introduced.

Improved safety, difficult implementation

There is evidence that red light cameras make roads safer.

A 2016 study of programs in 79 U.S. cities including Philadelphia by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety — a nonprofit funded by insurance companies and industry backers — found the cameras reduced the rate of all types of fatal crashes at intersections with signals by 14%.

Wen Hu, a researcher for the institute, told Spotlight PA that red light and speed cameras have "proven effective in changing drivers' behaviors, reducing crashes, and injuries and fatalities caused by crashes."

The Philadelphia Parking Authority primarily tracks the efficacy of the city's more than 100 red light cameras by seeing whether violations decrease at monitored intersections. If violations go down, that means knowing cameras are present prompts drivers to be safer, the idea goes. This metric has shown mixed results.

In a 2024 report, the authority said roughly half of the 34 locations with cameras have seen violations decrease since they were first installed. The other half had seen increases.

In total, the authority issued 39% more violations when comparing fiscal years 2023 and 2024. It attributed the increase to several factors, including the installation of more cameras, improvements to the cameras' recording abilities, and worsening driver behavior, such as cell phone distraction.

Still, some of the improvements were significant. Red light cameras at the intersection of Grant Avenue and Roosevelt Boulevard in Northeast Philadelphia, recorded 25,111 infractions in fiscal year 2006 and 6,150 in fiscal year 2024.

The cameras have “demonstrated substantial effectiveness in improving traffic safety and compliance,” the authority wrote.

Red light cameras have opponents, including Jay Beeber, executive director of the National Motorists Association. The group opposes automated traffic enforcement and speed enforcement by radar, and supports generally higher speed limits.

Beeber argued that traffic cameras do not solve underlying problems, which he says are poor traffic engineering in areas that have high levels of speeding, drivers running red lights, and car crashes.

He thinks the data reported by the Philadelphia Parking Authority are “cherry-picked.” The report shows only the number of violations that occurred after the cameras were installed, he said, not the number of violations before the cameras’ implementation.

“If the numbers were already going down and then the cameras go in and the numbers continue to go down, then the cameras had no impact,” Beeber said.

The commonwealth currently allows red light cameras in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, and municipalities that have at least 20,000 residents, an accredited police department, and are located in a large county that meets certain standards. As of 2017, 15 places met the latter definition.

Just four municipalities outside of Philadelphia had installed red light cameras as of April 2024, according to PennDOT — Abington and Montgomery Townships in Montgomery County, and Bensalem and Warrington Townships in Bucks County. Bristol Township in Bucks County approved their usage last December.

While there’s a significant price tag, governments make that money back from fines, set at \$100 under state law. In fiscal year 2024, Philadelphia generated \$32 million in revenue from these violations.

Some of that pays for the cameras. Most goes to PennDOT, which reallocates the money to counties through grants for “improving safety, enhancing mobility, and reducing congestion.”

The slow adoption of the cameras appears to be logistical.

Pittsburgh City Council first voted to install red light cameras in 2013, but the city didn’t follow through and the ordinance expired in 2017.

Last year, the city adopted a “Vision Zero” strategy in the hopes of eliminating all traffic fatalities, and the council voted to move forward again with red light cameras as part of that initiative. But in February, WPXI reported that only one company had bid to install and operate the cameras. New bids are due in April.

A staffer for a council member told Spotlight PA the new request has produced more bids. Vendors, they said, didn’t initially apply due to a lack of details such as where the cameras would be located.

Current requirements also make it hard for smaller municipalities to take part, said Amy Sturges of the Pennsylvania Municipal League, a nonprofit that advocates for small cities and towns.

The process involves seeking approval for a plan from PennDOT and finding a vendor to install the cameras. The local police department must also seek accreditation from the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association, which Sturges called “lengthy, time-consuming, and expensive.”

Sturges said neither she nor the municipalities she works with oppose automatic enforcement programs. She said some have expressed interest because the state does not permit speed enforcement radar devices.

“Local police departments’ current tools for speed enforcement are very limited,” Sturges said. “Red light cameras are another option that some communities would be able to use.”

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Are there red-light cameras in Pennsylvania?

<https://www.abc27.com/news/traffic/are-there-red-light-cameras-in-pennsylvania/>

By: Hayden Sherry

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(WHTM) — It is against the law to run a red light, but some wonder if there are cameras above the stoplights that can catch you speeding through a red light in Pennsylvania.

According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, red light running occurs frequently and is often deadly, as 1,149 people in the United States were killed and over 107,000 people were injured in crashes that involved red light running in 2022.

Half of those who were killed were pedestrians, bicyclists, and people in other vehicles.

State law authorizes red-light cameras to be used in first-class cities, second-class cities, and certain municipalities in certain counties.

According to Census.gov, first-class cities inhabit more than 1 million people, and Pennsylvania’s only first-class city is Philadelphia.

Municipalities with 20,000 or more residents as of the 2010 census in second class A counties with a police force accredited by the Pennsylvania Chiefs of Police Association can also use red light cameras. Also authorized are such municipalities in third class counties with populations between 490,000 and 510,000.

The only second class A counties in Pennsylvania, according to the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania, are Bucks, Delaware, Lancaster, and Montgomery. The only third class county with the required 2010 census population is Chester.

Is covering your license plate illegal in Pennsylvania?

In 2005, state legislators enacted the Red Light Camera Program after reports named certain intersections along Roosevelt Boulevard in Philadelphia as some of the most dangerous in the country.

However, no legislation has been passed that allows red-light cameras to be installed anywhere outside Philadelphia County.