



WASHINGTON, DC: AUTOMATED SPEED ENFORCEMENT¹

A Community Speed Reduction Case Study

DECEMBER 2013

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THE PROBLEM

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, transportation and public opinion data indicated that Washington, DC had a significant traffic speed problem. In 2001, nearly 60 percent of traffic fatalities — twice the national average — were speed-related.² Moreover, in a public opinion poll, 62 percent of Washington, DC (District) residents identified dangerous driving as their top concern, above crime and other issues.³

Traffic safety posed a unique challenge to the Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) because so many people commuted into the city from other jurisdictions. Data from the red light enforcement program, started in 1999, indicated that three-fourths of violations were committed in vehicles not registered in Washington, DC, making enforcement difficult.



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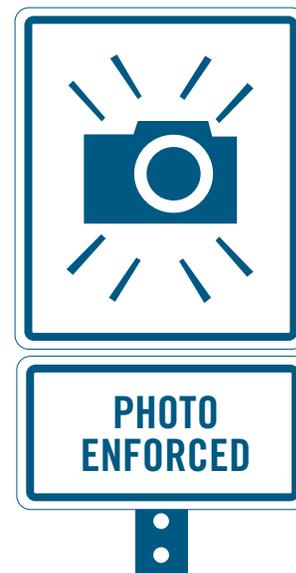
THE SOLUTION

Speed reduction approach

MPD achieved its goal of reducing speed-related crashes, injuries, and fatalities by implementing a program that uses automated enforcement technology. MPD's experience with the federally funded Click It or Ticket seat belt enforcement program showed that consistent enforcement of traffic laws effectively changed driver behavior. MPD believed that the consistency of automated enforcement technology would help to change driver behavior by encouraging drivers to slow down, stop at red lights, and be more attentive. DC's Photo Enforcement Program uses stationary and portable photo radar cameras, cameras in vehicles, and intersection safety cameras. The photo radar system takes photographs of those vehicles in violation of the posted speed. Violations result in fines ranging from \$50–300⁴ and tickets are mailed to the registered owner of the vehicle. No points are assessed to the drivers' records. Dozens of photo enforcement signs across the city alert drivers to the existence of the program. District officials are considering reciprocity agreements with nearby jurisdictions providing that neighboring cities/states will hold their own residents accountable for violations acquired in the other city or state.

The District uses both fatality and collision data, along with community recommendations, to identify automated enforcement sites. As of May, 2013 the District had 10 permanent sites and 15 portable sites. In addition, six days a week up to 18 vehicles with photo enforcement are deployed to sites across the city.

At intersections where crashes are particularly problematic, MPD works with the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to validate the speed limit prior to enforcement and to assess sites for implementation of engineering interventions that may alleviate speeding, including additional signage, traffic calming measures, pavement markings, and bike/pedestrian facilities. DC Photo Enforcement is part of a larger Washington, DC effort to promote walking and bicycling and make the city more livable.



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THE PROCESS

Key planning and implementation steps

In 1997, the city council passed enabling legislation. The legislation provides that any moving violation can be photo-enforced. In August 1999, the city began its red light camera program. The response to the Request for Proposal (RFP) from the red light program vendor included an option to provide speed enforcement if the District decided to do so. The District exercised that option in 2001.

Prior to program launch, MPD made a great effort to communicate its goals and intended outcomes to the community by speaking at citizen meetings and soliciting input on where to place cameras. It created a comprehensive media kit that included data and information about the program as well as a video to educate people waiting for traffic violation hearings. Communication materials focus on the goal of reducing collisions, injuries, and fatalities that result from dangerous driving. MPD engages in ongoing dialogue with the community by attending community meetings and by providing educational information through traditional and social media outlets.

Partners

While MPD manages the DC Photo Enforcement program, it coordinates with many District agencies to ensure the program's successful implementation. These partners include the Mayor's office, city council, DDOT, and the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV). The MPD works closely with the Mayor and city council on issues related to the program and its budget. MPD coordinates with DDOT, which installs traffic calming measures when they are deemed potentially effective for a site. The DMV administers the ticket processing system and adjudicates tickets. MPD also ensures coordination to mitigate adverse effects of program changes.

Costs

The District implemented the automated enforcement program without financial risk because traffic fines initially paid for purchase and installation of the equipment.

Now, because of community and political support for and success of the program, the Mayor allocates and city council approves general funding to support the program, ensuring continuous management of equipment and program implementation. A dedicated Program Manager manages all aspects of the program, including analysts, ticket reviewers, field personnel, police officers, and programmers. The automated technology program is more cost-effective than paying police officers to issue tickets because the technology operates 24 hours a day and it is widely dispersed across the city. Furthermore, the program allows MPD to use its police resources more strategically and effectively to address other law enforcement issues, such as crime prevention.

CONCLUSION

DC's Automated Enforcement program has demonstrated significant public health and safety benefits. The number of traffic fatalities in DC has dropped from 68 in 2003 to 19 in 2012.⁵ Average speeds among all vehicles in DC have been reduced, and the rate of speeding over 10 mph above the speed limit has dropped from one in three drivers to just one in 40.⁶ The District typically sees a 60 to 80 percent reduction in speeding violations within a few months of cameras being deployed at a site. A 2003 study showed that there was a 14 percent decline in mean speed and an 82 percent decline in speeding vehicles six months after implementing mobile speed enforcement cameras in Washington, DC.⁷ A 2013 survey of District residents indicated strong community support for the program, with 76 percent of those surveyed favoring speed cameras.⁸ The automated enforcement program complements other efforts to make the city more livable. City officials have reduced the per capita number of car parking spaces and increased bike parking, made car-sharing services more widely available, implemented a bike share program, added over 50 miles of bike lanes, and connected bike networks to public transit stations.⁹



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To learn more about how speed reduction can benefit public health:

- Public Health Impact: Community Speed Reduction
- Speed Reduction Fact Sheet: Opportunities to Improve Current Practice
- Community Speed Reduction and Public Health: A Technical Report

Case Studies:

- Chicago, Illinois: Child Safety Zones
- Columbia, Missouri: Lowering The Posted Speed Limit On Residential Streets
- New York City: Neighborhood Slow Zones
- Portland, Oregon: Neighborhood Greenway Initiative
- Seattle, Washington: A Multi-Faceted Approach To Speed Reduction

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- ⁷ Retting R, and C.M. Farmer,. Evaluation of speed camera enforcement in the District of Columbia. Transportation Research Record, no. 1830, 2003.
- ⁸ Insurance Institute for Highway Safety News Release. D.C. residents agree red light cameras, speed cameras make streets safer in nation's capital, IIHS survey reveals. 2013; Available from: <http://www.iihs.org/news/rss/pr042513.html>.
- ⁹ District Department of Transportation. Bicycle Infrastructure in DC: Build It and They Will Ride 2011; Available from: http://www.dc.gov/DC/DDOT/Publication%20Files/On%20Your%20Street/Bicycles%20and%20Pedestrians/Bicycles/nbm_may2011.pdf.