

Date of Hearing: July 7, 2025

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Lori D. Wilson, Chair

SB 720 (Ashby) – As Amended May 1, 2025

SENATE VOTE: 31-3

SUBJECT: Automated traffic enforcement system programs

SUMMARY: Authorizes the use of automated traffic enforcement systems to detect violations of traffic control signals. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Requires that a violation recorded by the automated traffic enforcement system to be subject only to a civil penalty, and that the violation not result in the Department of Motor Vehicles suspending or revoking the privilege of a violator to drive a motor vehicle or in a violation point being assessed against the violator.
- 2) Requires automated red light systems to be placed in locations that are geographically and socioeconomically diverse, and at intersections where data indicates there is a heightened safety risk that warrants additional enforcement measures. The designated jurisdiction shall describe how it has complied with this provision.
- 3) Authorizes a local authority to issue a ticket to the registered owner of the vehicle based on a photograph of the detected vehicle's license plate.
- 4) Requires signage indicating the use of the automated enforcement cameras.
- 5) Prohibits a designated jurisdiction from reducing yellow light interval durations after the placement of the systems.
- 6) Requires the local authority to develop an Automated Traffic Enforcement System Impact Report prior to implementing the program which assesses any impact on civil liberties, a description of the program, program cost, if potential deployment locations are predominantly in low-income neighborhoods, and the locations where a system will be deployed with traffic data for these locations. The report must be available for public review prior to adoption and consultation with racial equity, privacy protection, and economic justice groups is required.
- 7) Requires that a public information program be commenced for at least 30 days prior to the implementation of the camera program and that for the first 60 days of enforcement only warning notices be issued.
- 8) Requires that the local authority establish guidelines for the screening and issuing of notices of violation, the inspection and maintenance of the equipment, and for the processing and storage of confidential information.
- 9) Requires that the notice of violation, which shall be sent within 15 days of the violation, shall include a clear photograph of the license plate, rear of the vehicle, and traffic control

signal, the Vehicle Code violation, the location, the date and time the violation occurred, an affidavit that the signal conformed with the yellow light interval established by the MUTCD, and a web address link to the video of the violation.

- 10) Provides for a fine to the registered owner of the vehicle of \$100 if an individual is indigent, as defined, the individual must be offered community service in lieu of the fine, or the fine is reduced by 80%. The fine is reduced by 50% if the individual makes up to 250% above the federal poverty level.
- 11) Authorizes a late penalty of \$50.
- 12) Provides that the revenue from the fines remain with the cities and shall pay for the installation of the cameras, the adjudication of violations, and construction of traffic calming measures to improve traffic safety. If traffic calming measures aren't deployed within three years the funds revert to the state for use in the Active Transportation Program (ATP).
- 13) Establishes a process where the registered owner can request a review of the fine by the issuing agency and a hearing on the fine by the issuing agency.
- 14) Establishes that the photos and administrative records shall be confidential, and that public agencies shall use and allow access to these records only for the purposes of the automated enforcement system. Limits on how long records can be retained are established and disclosures to others prohibited.
- 15) Provides that a person will not be subject to a civil violation if there is proof the vehicle was being used by someone sharing their vehicle in a personal vehicle sharing program or if proof of a copy of a police report indicating the vehicle had been stolen at the time of the violation, in addition to the existing provision for the owner of a rental car.
- 16) Requires the local authority to publish an annual report that includes, the number of alleged violations captured by the system, the number of citations issued by a law enforcement agency based on information collected from the system, the types of violations, and the number and percentage of citations that are dismissed by the court.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Authorizes the use of automated traffic enforcement systems (i.e., red light cameras) at railroad crossings and intersections to record violations of unlawful grade crossings and running of red lights. (Vehicle Code section (VEH) 21455.5)
- 2) Conditions the use of red light cameras on several requirements and procedures, including the following:
 - a) Only a governmental agency in cooperation with a law enforcement agency may operate a system;
 - b) Intersections equipped with the enforcement systems must be identified by signs visible to traffic in all directions or by signs posted at all major entrances to the participating city;

- c) The city council or county board of supervisors must conduct a public hearing on the proposed use of an automated enforcement system;
 - d) The governmental agency that proposes to install or operate an automated traffic enforcement system may not consider revenue generation, beyond recovering its actual costs of operating the system, as a factor when considering whether or not to install or operate a system within its local jurisdiction;
 - e) Use of the system must be preceded by public notice by the local jurisdiction at least 30 days in advance, and only warning notices may be issued to violators during the first 30 days of the system's operation, after which citations may be issued;
 - f) All photographic records are confidential and shall be made available only to the affected governmental agencies for enforcement purposes;
 - g) Requires a peace officer or "qualified employee" of a law enforcement agency to review the photograph taken by an automated traffic enforcement system and issue a citation, as appropriate;
 - h) Any driver alleged to be a violator of the red light provisions or the vehicle's registered owner is permitted to review the photographic evidence of the alleged violation;
 - i) Citations must be delivered to the driver within 15 days of the alleged violations, with a certificate of mailing obtained as evidence of service, and must include specified information, including how, when, and where the citation may be challenged; and,
 - j) A contract between a governmental agency and a manufacturer or supplier of automated traffic enforcement equipment shall not include a provision for the payment or compensation to the manufacturer or supplier based on the number of citations generated, or as a percentage of the revenue generated. (VEH 21455.5)
- 3) Requires a manufacturer or supplier that operates an automated traffic enforcement system, in cooperation with the governmental agency to submit an annual report to the Judicial Council that includes, the number of alleged violations captured by the system, the number of citations issued by a law enforcement agency based on information collected from the system, the types of violations, the number and percentage of citations that are dismissed by the court, and the number of traffic collisions at each intersection that occurred prior to, and after the installation of, the automated traffic enforcement system. (VEH 21455.5)

FISCAL EFFECT:

According to Senate Appropriations Committee:

- Unknown, potentially significant court workload cost pressures for superior courts to hear and adjudicate appeals of hearing officer determinations that are brought under the provisions of this bill. These costs would be partially offset by the \$25 fees for filing appeals. There could be further offsetting court costs to the extent that violations issued pursuant to the bill supplant other red light violations that must be adjudicated in traffic court. See Staff Comments. (Trial Court Trust Fund, General Fund).
- Unknown, potentially significant loss of state and local penalty assessment revenues, to the extent that enforcement of red light violations under the bill (which result in a notice of violation subject to a flat civil penalty of \$100) supplant enforcement of red light violations by law enforcement or current automated enforcement systems (which result in a traffic citation, subject to a base fine of \$100, additional penalty fees and assessments, and a

violation point on a driver's record). These revenue losses are unquantifiable and would depend upon how many alternative automated enforcement systems are installed following the bill's enactment, and how many notices of violations are issued that would otherwise have been enforced by means authorized under current law. See staff comments. (General Fund, local funds, and various special funds)

- Unknown, significant local costs for the specified cities to establish and administer automated traffic enforcement systems, including adopting specified policies and guidelines prior to implementing a program, conducting a public information campaign, entering into contracts with suppliers of camera enforcement systems, identifying sites, installing signage and infrastructure, adjudicating violations, establishing a diversion program for indigent violation recipients, and evaluating and reporting the systems' impacts. Staff notes that any costs incurred by local agencies to establish and administer an automated speed enforcement system would not be state-reimbursable because those costs would be attributable to a discretionary action, rather than a state mandated local program. In addition, any local costs are likely to be fully offset by revenue gains from civil penalties paid by violators of speed laws in enforcement zones. (local funds)

COMMENTS: According to California Highway Patrol (CHP) data between 2013 and 2022 1,245 people in California lost their lives as a result of someone running a red light. Most of those deaths were people inside of a vehicle (974 of the 1,245 deaths). In that same time period, 6,872 people were seriously injured (more than 5,500 within their vehicle and 848 on a bicycle) by someone running a red light.

Red light deaths and serious injuries have been on the rise. In 2012, 106 people died and 467 people were seriously injured as a result of red light running. By 2022, that number has risen to 171 deaths and 927 serious injuries. Nationally 1,149 people were killed as a result of someone running a red light (red light running deaths are 27% higher than expected in California based on its population share).

Effectiveness of red light cameras: Automated enforcement for reducing red light violations has been shown to be effective. According to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), "Institute studies in Oxnard, California, and Fairfax, Virginia, reported reductions in red light violation rates of about 40% after the introduction of red light safety cameras (Retting et al., 1999; Retting et al., 1999). In addition to the decrease in red light running at camera-equipped sites, the effect carried over to nearby signalized intersections not equipped with cameras.

"When it comes to crash reductions, an IIHS study comparing large cities with red light safety cameras to those without found the devices reduced the fatal red light running crash rate by 21% and the rate of all types of fatal crashes at signalized intersections by 14% (Hu & Cicchino, 2017). Previous research in Oxnard, California, found significant citywide crash reductions followed the introduction of red light safety cameras, and injury crashes at intersections with traffic signals were reduced by 29% (Retting & Kyrychenko, 2002). Front-into-side collisions — the crash type most closely associated with red light running — at these intersections declined by 32% overall, and front-into-side crashes involving injuries fell 68%.

"A study sponsored by the Federal Highway Administration evaluated red light safety camera programs in seven cities (Council et al., 2005). It found that, overall, right-angle crashes decreased by 25% while rear-end collisions increased by 15%. Results showed a positive

aggregate economic benefit of more than \$18.5 million in the seven communities. The authors concluded that the economic costs from the increase in rear-end crashes were more than offset by the economic benefits from the decrease in right-angle crashes targeted by cameras.”

Dangers of turning cameras off: A large number of California cities have turned their red light cameras off for financial reasons. Most recently, the Sacramento Sheriff’s Department turned off 24 red light cameras in 2024 due to budget constraints. The City of Los Angeles turned off their red light cameras in 2011 as a result of the cost to operate and unfair adjudication of cases (see below).

An IIHS study compared large cities that turned off red light safety cameras with those with continuous camera programs. “In 14 cities that shut down their programs during 2010-14, the fatal red light running crash rate was 30% higher than would have been expected if they had left the cameras on. The rate of fatal crashes at signalized intersections was 16% higher (Hu & Cicchino, 2017). A study in Houston, which turned off red light safety cameras in 2011, found that camera deactivation was associated with a 23% increase in right-angle red light running crashes at the intersections that previously had cameras (Ko et al., 2017).”

Civil vs. criminal penalties: Twenty three states currently operate a red light camera program. Almost all of those states besides California treat red light camera violations as a civil violation without accessing points on your license. California has recently shifted towards permitting traffic violations captured by automated enforcement to be civil and not criminal violations, including speed cameras, bus and bike lane parking enforcement cameras, and toll violations.

A criminal violation for running a red light in California results in a fine close to \$500 in most counties, in addition to other court costs to take traffic violator school to remove the point on your license. Two points on a person’s license can result in a 20% increase in insurance rates, and four points can result in a suspension of a person’s license.

As a result of the violation being criminal, the state has to prove beyond a reasonable doubt who is behind the wheel at the time of the violation (this has resulted in individuals covering their face to avoid a red light camera ticket). Failing to appear in court for any violation, including a traffic infraction, is a misdemeanor with an additional \$300 civil penalty. As a result, several county court houses have felt uncomfortable enforcing red light camera violations because there is insufficient evidence that the person has notice of the violation and knows they have to appear in court. The City of Los Angeles removed their red light camera program in part because the city council felt uncomfortable with the notion that only people without knowledge of this fact were paying for red light camera violations.

This bill authorizes a city to issue a civil violation instead of a criminal violation and to utilize the same enforcement system as a parking ticket. The violation is against the car, not the driver. This bill creates a process for non-liability for rental cars. Points will not be accessed against the owner of the vehicle, aligned with most states that operate red light cameras. A two month warning period will be in effect when the new cameras start issuing tickets. Low-income violators will be provided the opportunity to reduce the cost of their tickets. No points will be accessed against a violator which is consistent with other states that issue red light camera violations. Unlike a traditional criminal ticket, cities will retain all of the revenue from the red light camera ticket. However, cities will only be able to use the tickets to pay for the cost of the program and traffic safety features to make roads safer.

Red light camera abuse by cities. The red light camera program had a rocky history in California leading to the perception that camera enforcement was designed for revenue and not for safety purposes. SB 667 (Peace), Chapter 496, Statutes of 2001 required that at intersections with an automated enforcement system the minimum yellow light change intervals are established in accordance with the MUTCD. This was a result of a report released by the Red Light Camera Defense Team, which evaluated San Diego's red light camera program and found that the city was installing red lights at intersections with extremely short yellow lights and high traffic volume. One camera was installed in the city at an intersection that had a single collision, but was generating more than \$6.7 million in fine revenue in part because of the shortened yellow light.

Recent amendments conform the civil right light camera program with SB 667 and require cities to provide an affidavit that the law was complied with for every violation issued.

According to the author, "Every year, roughly 4,000 people lose their lives to unsafe driving on California streets. SB 720 establishes the Safer Streets Act, which is a critical step towards reducing traffic accidents and fatalities. This bill allows cities to opt in to a new red light camera system in high collision areas. SB 720 changes the violation from a criminal penalty to a civil penalty - easing insurance prices for drivers and creating a more equitable framework in a space historically associated heavily with bias and over criminalization. The Safer Streets Act ensures that revenue generated from the new program funds local safety initiatives, including vital road infrastructure improvements. SB 720 ensures that cities have the tools to create safer streets and to invest in local pedestrian and motorist safety measures."

Streets are for Everyone, *the sponsors of this bill*, argue "Red light running is not just a problem for vehicle-on-vehicle collisions but continues to be a disproportionate risk faced by vulnerable populations, such as pedestrians, cyclists, and children traveling to school.

"California's red light traffic enforcement system has not been updated since 1995 and contains several outdated features. It requires capturing a photo of the driver, raising concerns regarding data collection and storage, and imposes one of the highest fines in the country, up to \$500. California is currently the only state in the US that still issues moving violations to drivers caught by red light traffic enforcement systems. This has proven problematic in a court of law.

"SB 720 would establish an opt-in red light camera program for local jurisdictions to use called the Safer Streets Program, which is designed to save lives, improve privacy and security, and eliminate costly fines. The Safer Streets Program would issue civil violations (similar to a parking ticket) to the owners of vehicles that run red lights. It wouldn't affect one's driving record and wouldn't result in higher insurance. It has stronger privacy provisions since a photo of the driver's face is no longer required. It also has a way for low-income drivers to reduce their fines automatically. Any profit generated by the Safer Streets Program must first be used for program cost recovery and any remaining funds can only be utilized for safer streets initiatives, including pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicle safety improvements.

"SB 720 has been designed in alignment with the Automated Enforcement Program Checklist, a checklist co-written by the National Safety Council, Governor Highway Safety Association, The Automobile Club of America, and several other organizations as the best way to implement automated enforcement programs as a tool to prevent traffic violence."

The National Motorist Association, *writing in opposition of this bill*, argue “SB-720 transforms red-light camera programs into high-volume, low-oversight ticketing operations. Camera vendors benefit from reduced operational costs—no need to identify drivers or prepare evidence—and cities benefit from a steady revenue stream. As past program data shows, jurisdictions tend to increase ticket volume by targeting minor violations rather than dangerous behavior. Cities that don’t generate enough revenue through these tactics often end their programs, confirming that financial viability—not safety—is the driving force.”

Committee concerns: Under the provisions of this bill, the only evidence admissible to prove a violation is a picture of a license plate. This evidence is only sufficient to prove a vehicle was at an intersection, and creates no opportunity for a person to contest that they violated the law.

SB 667 (Peace), Chapter 496, Statutes of 2001 required that at intersections with an automated enforcement system the minimum yellow light change intervals are established in accordance with the MUTCD. This bill does not require the new red light camera program to conform to this requirement. Further, in a criminal proceeding, a person can require a traffic engineer testify that this law was in fact complied with.

The penalty in this bill is \$100 for running a red light. This penalty would be one fifth of the fine that exists today for running a red light. The penalty would also be as low as many parking tickets in this state. (Parking tickets in San Francisco are over \$100.) Considering the severity of the offense, the Legislature may want to consider if \$100 is an appropriate fine. This bill provides for lowered fines for individuals 250% above the poverty line or less (50% reduction) and 200% above the poverty line or less (80% reduction).

The Legislature has changed few traffic violations from a criminal offense to a civil offense. When that change has been made, the Legislature has generally included a clause that a person cannot receive both a criminal offense and a civil offense for the same offense, and in that instance favors the criminal offense since it is against the actual driver and not the vehicle. This bill does not include such a clause.

This bill would allow for automated enforcement at freeway meters. The author’s office has indicated that provision was not part of their original intent.

The author has also indicated the desire for local authorities to come up with a separate policy related to making right turns on red lights without stopping first. There have been several jurisdictions that have eliminated right turn on red violations for automated enforcement or have set a speed threshold for the violation.

Therefore, the committee recommends the following amendments:

1. Require video evidence of the offense and provide appropriate language to protect an individual's privacy consistent with this bill and other automated traffic enforcement laws.
2. Require the new automated enforcement conform with SB 677 (Peace) and require local authorities to provide an affidavit attesting that the traffic signal conforms with the yellow light change interval in accordance with the MUTCD.
3. Create a tiered approach for penalties for running a red light in the following manner:
\$100 for the first offense, then
\$200 for the second offense.
\$350 for the third offense.
\$500 for the fourth and subsequent offenses.
4. Provide that a person shall not be assessed a civil penalty if they are subject to criminal penalties for the same act.
5. Require local jurisdictions to come up with guidelines related to violations for right turns on red.

Previous and related legislation: AB 1379 (Nguyen of 2025) would expand the list of cities authorized to establish a speed safety system pilot program to include the City of Sacramento. *This bill is currently in this committee.*

AB 289 (Haney of 2025) would authorize Caltrans to use automated speed enforcement cameras on state highway construction or maintenance areas. *This bill is currently in the Senate Judiciary Committee.*

SB 1297 (Allen), Chapter 631, Statutes of 2024 authorized the City of Malibu to establish an automated speed enforcement system on the Pacific Coast Highway.

AB 645 (Friedman), Chapter 808, Statutes of 2023 authorized, until January 1, 2032, the Cities of Los Angeles, San Jose, Oakland, Glendale, and Long Beach, and the City and County of San Francisco to establish a Speed Safety System Pilot Program if the system meets specified requirements.

SB 1079 (Portantino), Chapter 449, Statutes of 2022 required the CHP to evaluate the efficacy of sound-activated automated enforcement devices.

SB 1303 (Simitian), Chapter 735, Statutes of 2012 changed the laws governing automated traffic enforcement systems to ensure that red light camera programs maximize traffic safety and are implemented in a lawful and transparent manner.

AB 1022 (Oropeza), Chapter 511, Statutes of 2003, added conditions and restrictions to the use of automated traffic enforcement systems.

SB 667 (Peace) Chapter 496, statutes of 2001 required intersections where there is an automated enforcement system that the minimum yellow light change intervals are established in accordance with the MUTCD.

SB 1136 (Kopp) Chapter 54, Statutes of 1998, repealed the January 1, 1999, sunset date, and extended indefinitely provisions that allow the use of automated traffic enforcement systems at official traffic control signals.

SB 833 (Kopp) Chapter 922, Statutes of 1995, authorized a three-year demonstration period to test the use and effectiveness of automated traffic enforcement systems in reducing the incidence of drivers running red lights at roadway intersections.

SB 1216 (Rosenthal) Chapter 1216, Statutes of 1994, originally authorized automated enforcement at rail crossings.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Active San Gabriel Valley
Bicycle Solutions
Bike LA
Bike Long Beach
Bike SLO County
Bike Sunnyvale
Car-lite Long Beach
Circulate San Diego
City of Malibu
City of Sacramento
City of San Diego
City of West Hollywood
Consumers for Auto Reliability & Safety
Costa Mesa Alliance for Better Streets
East Bay for Everyone
Families for Safe Streets San Diego
League of California Cities
Livable Communities Initiative
Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative
Los Angeles Walks
Move LA
Move Santa Barbara County
Mujeres De LA Tierra
National Coalition for Safer Roads
Norwalk Unides
Pasadena Complete Streets Coalition
PeopleForBikes
Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates
San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
Santa Monica Families for Safe Streets
Santa Monica Safe Streets Alliance
Santa Monica Spoke
Slow Down Sacramento

So Cal Cycling
Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition
Street Racing Kills
Streets are for Everyone
Streets for All
Strong Towns Artesia
Strong Towns Santa Barbara
Walk San Francisco
West Hollywood Bicycle Coalition
West Hollywood/hernan Molina, Governmental Affairs Liaison

Opposition

National Motorists Association

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