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2007 Virginia DOT Report Shows Red Light Cameras Increase Accidents

A new Virginia Department of Transportation study shows accidents increased by nearly a third where red light cameras were used.

The Virginia Transportation Research Council today released a report expanding upon earlier research into the safety effects of red light cameras in Virginia. The new study, funded by the Virginia Department of Transportation and the Federal Highway Administration, provided a city-by-city assessment that showed significant increases in the number of injuries and accidents at intersections employing photo enforcement.

The change in the frequency of injury accidents varied widely among jurisdictions -- down 5 percent in one but up between 6 and 89 percent in all others. Even within a jurisdiction some intersections fared better than others. In Fairfax County, for example, the total number of crashes increased at every intersection with a camera, except for one -- Route 50 and Fair Ridge. VDOT increased the duration of the yellow light from 4 seconds to 5.5 seconds on August 12, 1998. [Research by the Texas Transportation Institute](#) confirmed that longer yellows yield significant accident reductions. Overall, the data in the VTRC report painted a grim picture consistent with prior, [independent investigations](#).

"The cameras were associated with an increase in total crashes. Arlington and Fairfax County saw significant increases, Falls Church and Vienna saw non significant increases, and Fairfax City saw a nonsignificant decrease."

Although it is now widely accepted that red light cameras are associated with increases in the number of rear end collisions, the VTRC report did not solely attribute the overall increase in accidents and injuries to this type of collision. Angle collisions also increased.

"Cameras were associated with an increase of between 31 percent and 54 percent for rear-end crashes overall," the report found. "The association of the cameras with angle crashes differed among jurisdictions, although a preponderance of test results suggested an increase."

Contrary to industry claims, this was not a temporary phenomenon.

"The cameras were not associated with a decrease in rear-end crashes over time after the initial increase that followed camera installation," the report found.

Red light cameras were authorized in Virginia between 1995 and 2005. After a two year battle with municipal lobbyists and the insurance industry, the Virginia state legislature re-authorized the use of red light cameras. The law took effect July 1. The full text of the study is available in a 1mb PDF file at the source link below.

Key Statistic:

City	Rear End	Angle	Injury	Total
Arlington	+139%	+53%	+89%	+65%
Fairfax City	+10%	-35%	-5%	-7%
Fairfax County	+40%	+8%	+6%	+23%
Falls Church	+136%	-15%	+79%	+38%
Vienna	+64%	-6%	+59%	+25%
<i>Average</i>	<i>+42%</i>	<i>+20%</i>	<i>+18%</i>	<i>+29%</i>

Source: [The Impact of Red Light Cameras on Crashes in Virginia](#) (Virginia Transportation Research Council, 7/5/2007)

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