

Department of Legislative Services
Maryland General Assembly
2002 Session

FISCAL NOTE

House Bill 35 (Delegate K. Kelly)
Commerce and Government Matters

Task Force to Study Traffic Control Signal Monitoring Systems

This bill creates a six-member task force to evaluate the accuracy, effectiveness, operation, and contractor fee structures of traffic control signal monitoring systems. The Motor Vehicle Administration (MVA) will staff the task force.

The bill's effective date is June 1, 2002, with the task force report due by January 1, 2003. The bill sunsets May 31, 2003.

Fiscal Summary

State Effect: The bill's requirements could be handled with existing budgeted resources.

Local Effect: None.

Small Business Effect: None.

Analysis

Current Law: Several metropolitan/suburban jurisdictions currently operate traffic control signal monitoring systems, including Baltimore City, Howard County, Montgomery County, and Prince George's County.

Background: A national dialog continues on the use of traffic control signal monitoring systems (systems in which cameras photograph vehicles that disobey red traffic lights), focused on the central themes of delegation of authority, traffic safety, and conflict of interest. In September of 2001, a San Diego Superior Court judge ruled that a red light

camera system operated by a private company was unreliable, that a conflict of interest arose because the company received payment based on the number of citations issued, and that it may be in conflict with a state law that forbids law enforcement activities from being contracted to private companies. Another topic of debate centers on the Sixth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and how -- or whether -- remote technology such as red light cameras is consistent with the constitutional right to confront one's accusers.

Advocates for red light cameras cite greatly improved compliance with traffic signals at intersections where monitoring cameras are located and note that the overall effect will be to reduce the over 200,000 accidents -- and over 750 fatalities -- that are caused annually throughout the country by motorists who run red lights. One local jurisdiction estimates that red light running has decreased by up to 50% at intersections where monitoring systems were installed.

Detractors say that the enhanced revenues realized by both vendors and local governments can be the primary motivation for installing red light cameras, while traffic safety may or may not be improved. It is generally assumed that a signal monitoring device will yield approximately two times the cost of the system in annual revenue, but there is little available data to demonstrate a positive correlation between the presence of traffic signal monitoring cameras and greater safety in the form of fewer accidents or reduced injuries.

Additional Information

Prior Introductions: None.

Cross File: None.

Information Source(s): Department of Transportation (State Highway Administration, Motor Vehicle Administration), National Conference of State Legislatures, Department of Legislative Services

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