## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 17 | **Name:** | Greg Doss & Clifton Curry |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2015-0379 | **Date:** | December 1, 2015 |

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Motion 2015-0379 requiring that the Executive prepare a report evaluating the feasibility of utilizing automated traffic safety cameras as authorized by RCW 46.63.170 for the enforcement of speed limits in school zones in unincorporated King County.

**SUMMARY**

This is the committee’s second meeting considering Proposed Motion 2015-0379, which would require that the Executive examine the feasibility of using automated cameras to enforce speed limits in school zones in the unincorporated parts of the county. At the committee’s November 3rd meeting, staff briefed members on road and pedestrian safety, the use of automated school zone speed enforcement cameras, and also described the proposed motion. At this meeting, staff received direction to incorporate changes to the motion recommended by the Department of Transportation, the agency which would lead the study effort. Staff have prepared an amendment that maintains the basic requirement for a report from the Executive that provides information on the feasibility of the potential use of school zone speed enforcement cameras, but restructures how the Executive will develop the report.

**BACKGROUND**

According to data developed by the King County Department of Transportation’s Road Services Division, more than one million trips are taken on King County’s unincorporated 1,500 mile road network each day. In addition to unincorporated residents, more than a quarter of a million other people use the same roads to commute to school and work, recreational activities, to move goods from farm to market, and as routes for freight and businesses.

Several county agencies have responsibilities for the safety of drivers and pedestrians using the county’s unincorporated roads. The King County Department of Transportation’s Road Services Division is responsible for the safety and maintenance of the county’s roads; the King County Sheriff’s Office is responsible for enforcement of traffic laws on these roads; the King County District Court is responsible for adjudicating and processing traffic enforcement citations; and, the Public Health-Seattle & King County is responsible for monitoring safety and public health risks including those related to traffic safety on county roads.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that in 2012, 4,743 pedestrians were killed in traffic crashes in the United States, and another 76,000 pedestrians were injured. According to the federal data, this averages to one crash-related pedestrian death every two hours, and a pedestrian injury every seven minutes. The federal government also reports that pedestrians are one and one-half times more likely than passenger vehicle occupants to be killed in a car crash on each trip. In 2012, more than one in every five children between the ages of five and fifteen who were killed in traffic crashes were pedestrians.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Public Health-Seattle & King County reports that traffic crashes are a significant source of injury burden in King County each year, noting that from 2008 to 2012, 424 people died in King County in motor vehicle-related crashes (average about 85 people per year) and an additional 3,182 people were seriously injured (about 636 people per year). The Public Health also reports that speeding is one of the main causes of traffic crashes. "Exceeding reasonable safe speed" was one of the leading contributing causes reported by law enforcement officers for all traffic collisions in Washington State in 2012, and accounted for 7,261 collisions in King County.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The King County Department of Transportation reported in its 2013 Collision Data Report a total of 1,693 collisions on King County maintained roadways in the unincorporated area with total societal and economic costs of these collisions estimated at $71 million dollars. The County found that speeding was a primary contributing factor in 36 percent of all fatalities and 15 percent of all injuries.[[3]](#footnote-3) Further, a recent summary study of speeding complaints from homeowners living on residential streets in unincorporated King County showed that the average speed was 35 to 45 percent higher than posted limits.[[4]](#footnote-4)

In terms of speeding in school zones, a national survey found two-thirds of drivers exceed the posted speed limit in school zones during the 30-minute periods before and after classes, resulting in injury accidents and fatalities for school age youth.[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Automated School Zone Speed Cameras.** Automated camera enforcement systems use a variety of systems to enforce speed limits. The system can be “fixed” using an in-ground sensing loop or radar coupled to automated cameras that digitally photograph vehicles and their license plates when these vehicles exceed a set limit (usually established by the jurisdiction implementing the cameras). Some vendors also have developed mobile sensors that allow the equipment to be moved from site to site. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention[[6]](#footnote-6) (CDC) and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration[[7]](#footnote-7) have identified automated speed enforcement cameras as an evidence-based best practice for reducing speed and speeding-related crashes, along with related property damage, injuries, and fatalities. The CDC notes in its summary of safety impact studies that automated speed cameras, including studies of camera systems in school zones, demonstrated “positive safety benefits” including significant reductions in injury crashes and property damage.

According to the National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances, the objective of automated traffic law enforcement, such as automated school zone cameras, is reduced traffic crashes and improved adherence to traffic laws through the use of photographic and electronic technology as a supplement for traditional traffic law enforcement. According to the committee, this type of enforcement should be used at high crash sites, at other high-risk locations, or in situations where traffic law enforcement personnel cannot be utilized, either due to the pressing needs of other law enforcement activities or where inherent on-site problems make traditional law enforcement difficult. Further, the committee notes that automated traffic law enforcement is not intended to replace traditional law enforcement personnel nor to mitigate safety problems caused by deficient road design, construction or maintenance. Rather, it provides enforcement at times and locations when police manpower is unavailable or its use raises safety concerns.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The Washington State Legislature enacted legislation in 2009 that created RCW 46.63.170, which allows local jurisdictions to use automated traffic safety cameras to detect school speed zone violations. The state statute makes these violations punishable as civil infractions where the local jurisdiction can establish a fine of up to $250, but are considered a non-moving violation and do not affect an individual’s driving records or become part of a criminal record. The failure to pay a fine can, however, result in collection activity that would affect the person’s ability to obtain credit.

While the City of Seattle is consistently recognized as one of the safest cities in the country, more than 10,000 traffic collisions occur there each year. In 2014, 3,449 injury collisions were reported to the Seattle Police Department. Fifteen people died in traffic crashes, including five who were walking or riding a bike. To address these safety issues, the city has created a policy effort entitled "Vision Zero," with the goal of eliminating traffic fatalities and serious injuries by 2030. The effort includes a variety of safety efforts including a significant expansion of the city's use of school zone safety camera zones to improve safety for students as they make their way to and from school.[[9]](#footnote-9) In addition to Seattle, automated school zone speed enforcement systems are currently used in at least eight other King County cities, including Bellevue, Federal Way, Des Moines, Issaquah, Kent, Lake Forest Park, and Renton, to improve school safety and generate revenue for safety or enforcement projects.

King County has more than 80 school sites in its unincorporated area. The Roads Services Division is responsible for ensuring the safety of students, other pedestrians, and drivers in these school zones. However, because of fiscal constraints, the Department of Transportation reports that the “division will not be able to respond to every request or concern that is raised. Conditions on the road system will worsen and resources must be focused on immediate critical safety needs.”[[10]](#footnote-10)

Revenues from citations in the school zones resulting from an automated camera program would, after program expenses are covered, go to the county’s General Fund. The National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances recommends dedicating infraction revenue from automated traffic law enforcement to road safety projects. If the county were to implement speed zone cameras, it appears that the Council could direct the use of excess citation revenues to school or other pedestrian safety projects.

**ANALYSIS**

This proposed motion would require that the Executive develop and submit to the council a report on the feasibility of utilizing automated traffic safety cameras as authorized by RCW 46.63.170 in school zones in unincorporated King County.

The proposed motion would require that the report summarize the findings, options, and recommendations identified by a School Traffic Safety Work Group. This work group would include, but not be limited to, representatives of the following agencies and entities:

* The Executive's Office;
* The Department of Transportation;
* The Sheriff’s Office;
* The District Court;
* The Department of Public Health;
* Representatives of school districts with school sites in unincorporated King County;
* The Washington state Department of Transportation (if it chooses to participate);
* Community representatives, including representatives from King County’s Community Service Areas; and,
* Council staff.

In this version of the motion, the work group would be tasked with conducting data gathering and analysis, including reviewing the county's current data on traffic volumes, numbers of pedestrians, vehicle collisions, traffic violations, and other data related to traffic safety at or near school sites in unincorporated King County. In addition, the motion requires that the group identify best and promising practices in other jurisdictions as models for the use of automated traffic cameras for county sites, to include identifying options for types of cameras, camera locations, and preferred camera operations (such as times of operation). Finally the group is required to review procurement options for the acquisition of automated traffic cameras and camera services, along with developing cost estimates based on best practices for the installation of automated traffic safety cameras and associated equipment.

Based on this information, the group is asked to report on the estimates on the county costs to operate an automated traffic safety camera system and developing estimates of the potential number of citations that might be issued and fine revenue generated.

The motion asks that, using this data, the Executive make recommendations for how best to implement a pilot or test program for evaluating the use of automated traffic safety cameras at selected school sites in the county. The motion does not require that the Executive develop legislation to either implement the pilot project, if one is proposed, or any other changes to county code that would be needed to implement the use of automated traffic camera enforcement. The decision to develop this legislation would be based on the Council review of the Executive’s report and the working group’s recommendations.

**PROPOSED AMENDMENT**

The Proposed Amendment was authored based on Department of Transportation input. It differs from the original motion in four ways. Each is discussed below:

1. **The Amendment requires that the report identify alternate traffic safety options for use in School Zones; including best engineering practices for traffic safety and alternative technical solutions for school zone safety and associated costs.**

The Department has stated that it is interested in ensuring that engineering principles are applied to individual sites to determine the best safety responses. Transportation staff have indicated that parents often seek a “One Size Fits All” approach using technology to address problems when other solutions could be more appropriate. Staff have also indicated that without studying individual issues and sites, and installing technology regardless of warrants, the County may not achieve the measure of safety desired.

1. **The Amendment establishes a technical work group to support the efforts of the Traffic Safety Work Group**.

The Department has suggested that Traffic Safety Workgroup (TSW) members will not have the capacity or technical knowledge necessary to gather or develop the data that is required under Section B1. Therefore, a technical committee comprised of road engineers and subject matter experts will perform the necessary leg work and brief the TSW as appropriate.

1. **The Amendment changes the report’s due date from June 1 to Sept 30**.

The change in the report’s due date may have a somewhat significant effect on the County’s ability to implment a school zone camera pilot in the short term; should it be the desire of the Council to move forward with such a program. The experience of neighboring jurisdictions suggests that it may take up to a year before a camera system could become operational. This delay becomes significant if the Council cannot take up the required enacting legislation before January of 2017.

Once potential sites are identified, the granting of permits, identification of power sources and construction of point-to-point speed loops can take many months to complete. This work could not begin until the Council has adopted an ordinance authorizing the use of school zone cameras and radifying site selection choices through a specific legislative analysis.[[11]](#footnote-11)

A September 30 transmittal due date will result in the report being transmitted during the Council’s budget session, a time when the committees traditionally defer non-budget legislation to the until the end of the fiscal biennium. If this happens and the Council does not authorize the program until early 2017, it would be unlikely that the County could implment a pilot program before the first quarter of 2018 or the 2018-19 school year.

1. **The Amendment does not require that the report contain the Cost-Benefit provision that were specified in the original motion**.

The underlying motion calls for “an analysis of the estimated costs and benefits associated with implementing and utilizing automated traffic safety cameras.” This approach would require the weighing of the total expected costs of available options against the total expected benefits, to see whether the benefits outweigh the costs, and by how much. In contrast, the proposed motion requires the Executive to gather only the costs of implementation. This does not provide the full range of analysis that is requested in the underlying motion.

**INVITED:**

* Brenda Bauer, Director, Road Services Division, Department of Transportation
* Rick Brater, County Road Engineer, Road Services Division, Department of Transportation

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Proposed Motion 2015-0379
2. Amendment 1.
1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “Injury Prevention and Control: Motor Vehicle Safety Pedestrian Safety,” http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/pedestrian\_safety/index.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Seattle/King County Department of Public Health. Traffic Safety http://www.kingcounty.gov/healthservices/health/injury/traffic.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. King County Department of Transportation, Road Services Division. “2013 Collision Data Report,” http://www.kingcounty.gov/~/media/depts/transportation/roads/traffic/2013KingCountyCollisionDataReport.ashx?la=en. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. King County Department of Transportation, Road Services Division, Traffic safety http://kingcounty.gov/depts/transportation/roads/traffic.aspx. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. “School Health Guidelines to Prevent Unintentional Injuries and Violence,” December 7, 2001. http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/rr5022a1.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Injury Prevention and Control: Motor Vehicle Safety “Intervention Fact Sheets: Automated Speed-Camera Enforcement,” http://www.cdc.gov/motorvehiclesafety/calculator/factsheet/speed.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, “Automated Enforcement: A Compendium of Worldwide Evaluation of Results,” September 2007, www.nhtsa.gov/DOT/NHTSA/Traffic%20Injury%20Control/Articles/Associated%20Files/HS810763.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. National Committee on Uniform Traffic Laws and Ordinances. “Automated Traffic Law Enforcement Model Law,” http://www.ncutlo.org/autoenforce622.htm. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. City of Seattle “A Vision for Safer Streets,” http://www.seattle.gov/visionzero. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. King County Department of Transportation “Strategic Plan for Road Services, July 2014 Update.” http://www.kingcounty.gov/~/media/transportation/kcdot/roads/SPRS/ExecSummarySPRSUpdateJuly2014.ashx?la=en [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See requirements of RCW 46.63.170 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)