

Unmanned photo radar cameras to catch Portland speeders get big push in Legislature



Currently, state law allows photo-radar enforcement, but an officer must be present and monitoring the equipment in order for the tickets to be valid. (*The Oregonian*)



By [Joseph Rose | The Oregonian/OregonLive](#)

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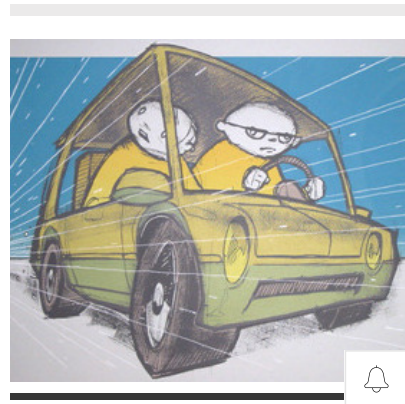
on March 10, 2015 at 11:21 AM, updated March 10, 2015 at 4:32 PM

For years, Portland traffic engineers and motorists have been debating [the benefits of the city's red light cameras](#). Before long, unmanned radar cameras could become part of the discussion.

Hoping to reduce the number of fatal and injury collisions on its [high-crash corridors](#), City Hall is pushing state lawmakers to approve the use of fixed-location "photo-enhanced radar enforcement" to go after speeders on designated roadways.

Currently, state law allows photo-radar enforcement, [but an officer must be present and monitoring the equipment](#) in order for the tickets to be valid.

[House Bill 2621](#), sponsored by Happy Valley Democrat Jeff Reardon, would allow the city to set up fixed-location radars wired to cameras along Portland's most hazardous roads as part of a pilot program. A police officer would not need to be present.



The devices would be programmed to automatically snap photos of vehicles traveling at a certain threshold above the speed limit. Currently, [Portland's radar vans send tickets to motorists going at least 11 mph over the limit.](#)

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Reardon's district includes East Portland, which is crisscrossed by three roadways - parts of Division Street, Burnside Street and 174th Avenue - that have been designated as dangerous high-crash corridors.

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Under the current law, the city has seen the number of photo radar tickets issued to motorists steadily increase in the past five years, even as residents drove less. Portland police say radar vans issued a record 33,486 citations in 2014.

Locate a high-crash corridor
The Portland Bureau of Transportation **lists all of the locations that would be affected** by unmanned photo radar under HB 2621.

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Seattle, one of the growing number of U.S. cities using fixed photo radar, plans to use [more than \\$15 million in revenue from the devices](#) to fund school safety programs. Last fall, PBOT spokesman [Dylan Rivera told the Willamette Week](#) money from the unmanned speeding cameras could "supplement" any street fee or tax passed by the City Council.

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Unmanned photo radar would allow the city to make enforcement revenue without forcing it to dedicate a large slice of the money to the high cost of paying officers to babysit the equipment.

For years, Portland's red light cameras were hemorrhaging money, even as the city sent out an increasing number of tickets to violators. The problem? [As The Oregonian/OregonLive reported last year](#), the City Council was using money from the fines to fund projects unrelated to traffic safety.

But Reardon and other supporters of the bill, including Portland Commissioner Steve Novick and Leah Treat, director of the Portland Bureau of Transportation, say the focus of HB 2621 is safety not the millions of dollars increased revenue that could be generated.

"I am deeply saddened by the number of traffic fatalities in East Portland each year," Reardon said in a statement. "My hope is that House Bill 2621 will keep our community safe by reminding drivers that when they speed on these high-crash corridors, they put their neighbors' lives at risk."

PBOT said the city's [10 designated high crash corridors](#) make up just 3 percent of the city's road network, but account for more than 50 percent of pedestrian fatalities in Portland. In 2014, 15 of the 28 traffic fatalities in Portland were pedestrians.

The House Transportation and Economic Development Committee heard testimony Monday on the proposed law in Salem. The bill, which needs approval from the committee to make it to the House floor, allows only Portland to set up a pilot program to test the effectiveness of unmanned photo radar.

During the hearing, Mary Lee Turner, a retired rehabilitation instructor for the Oregon Commission for the Blind, told the committee that the cameras would improve safety by prompting more motorists to slow down.

"As a lifelong legally-blind pedestrian in our community, it is increasingly critical that all people -- motorist, pedestrians, and cyclists -- using public roads know and abide by the laws," Turner said.



Would you support placing unmanned photo radar cameras in Portland high crash areas?

Yes.

No.

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Meanwhile, Novick, who oversees PBOT, reminded the committee that the likelihood that dying after being hit by a car is directly related to how fast the vehicle is going. "Speed kills," he said.

Treat said speeding is second only to driving-under-the-influence as a contributor to fatal crashes on the city's roads.

"Many cities, including Seattle to our north, and Chicago and Washington, D.C. where I served previously, are successfully using unmanned photo radar to curb dangerous speeding," she said at the hearing. "I feel it is an important tool to change behavior, improve safety, and reduce fatalities and serious injuries on our roads."

This isn't the first time that the city has advocated for unmanned speed radars. However, past bills, including ones setting up the radars in school zones, have disappeared soon after being proposed.

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