



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

MEETING DATE: August 16, 2005

ITEM NUMBER:

SUBJECT: LETTER OF RESPONSE TO THE 2004-2005 ORANGE COUNTY GRAND JURY REPORT, "RED LIGHT CAMERAS: AUTOMATED TRAFFIC COPS IN ORANGE COUNTY".

DATE: AUGUST 1, 2005

FROM: POLICE DEPARTMENT- FIELD OPERATIONS DIVISION

PRESENTATION BY: TOM CURTIS, LT.
TRAFFIC SAFETY BUREAU COMMANDER

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: TOM CURTIS
(714) 754-5191

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

- 1) Approve the letter of response in regard to the findings and recommendations of the 2004-2005 Orange County Grand Jury report, "Red Light Cameras: Automated Traffic Cops in Orange County".
- 2) Authorize the Mayor and the Police Chief to sign the letter of response and return it to Frederick P. Horn, Presiding Judge of the Superior Court.

BACKGROUND:

On May 31, 2005, the Orange County Grand Jury released a report, "Red Light Cameras: Automated Traffic Cops in Orange County" (copy attached). Pursuant to California Penal Code Sections 933 and 933.05, the City Council is required to respond to the report, specifically to Findings No. 6.1 and 6.2 and Recommendations No. 7.1 and 7.2. Additionally, the Police Chief is requested to respond to Finding No. 6.3 and Recommendation No. 7.2. A joint response from the City Council and the Police Chief is permissible. The response letter must be returned no later than 90 days after the public release date of the Grand Jury's report. The due date is August 29th, 2005.

ANALYSIS:

The following information reflects the findings and recommendations (*italicized*) of the Orange County Grand Jury and the responses by the City of Costa Mesa. The responses provided correspond to the respective item numbers in the report from the Grand Jury.

6. Findings

6.1 Camera revenues: *The five cities in Orange County using RLCs are unable to determine through existing accounting systems how much revenue the cameras are producing. Cities should have this information to make informed decisions about RLCs.*

Response: The City of Costa Mesa agrees with this finding. Historically, the data available to the City from the Court has not afforded the ability to match red light revenue received from the Court with the specific list of red light camera citations for which the revenue was generated. During the past couple of months, the City's Finance Department has been working with the Centralized Accounting Unit of Orange County Superior Court - CJC. The City has requested to be provided with a report to breakdown red light camera revenue by citation. The Court subsequently provided a sample report for red light camera revenue generated exclusively during the month of January 2005. This report was said to have been somewhat labor intensive to produce by the Centralized Accounting Unit staff. While this may be true, it is the City's goal to be able to receive reports of this nature on a monthly basis.

6.2 Unpaid citations: *Approximately 33 percent of all RLC citations issued by the five cities in 2004 were not paid, leading to potentially significant, but unknown, losses in revenue to the cities, the county, and the state.*

Response: The City of Costa Mesa agrees with, or at least cannot dispute, this finding, as we do not have the data from all five cities to claim otherwise. A review of the red light camera citations filed in 2004 by the City of Costa Mesa revealed that only 6.49% of the citations remain open (as of June 30, 2005). If all 996 of these open cites were to be paid, it would generate over \$325,000 of additional revenue for the City of Costa Mesa, the County of Orange and the State of California.

In an effort to improve the percentage of red light camera citations that reach final disposition, the City of Costa Mesa intends to implement an additional procedure that is within an existing policy established by the Executive Committee of the Orange County Superior Court (Title: Filing and Processing of Photo Red Light Citations). The finer points of the procedure are yet to be established between the City of Costa Mesa and the Harbor Justice Center, however, the framework for the procedure is already spelled out in the Court's policy. The purpose of the policy is to address the violators who fail to respond to their red light camera citations. Red light camera citations that involve violators who fail to appear for their scheduled hearing date will be reported back to the originating law enforcement agency 60 days from the filing date of the citation. The issuing agency will perform a Soundex (DMV Driver License photo) photograph comparison of the alleged violator

with the driver image captured during the original red light camera violation. In such cases where the Soundex photograph matches the driver's image from the red light camera violation, the issuing agency will return the Soundex photograph along with a signed affidavit (In Support of Request for DMV Hold on Driver License) to the court. The court may then process the matter pursuant to California Penal Code Section 1214.1 (Civil assessment for failure to appear).

Should the violator fail to respond to the Court's subsequent notice (CPC 1214.1), the Court may impose a \$250 civil assessment, a California Department of Motor Vehicles Driver License hold pursuant to California Vehicle Code Section 40509.5(a) (Notice to Department: Failure to Appear) and submit to the Franchise Tax Board Court-Ordered Debt (FTBCOD) and Franchise Tax Board Tax Intercept (FTBTI).

Note that the above procedure is an additional assessment and not in lieu of the responsibility of the violator to respond to the original red light camera citation. The procedure will certainly create an additional workload for the staff of the Court and the originating law enforcement agency. It is anticipated that implementation of the procedure will reduce the loss of red light camera citation revenue to the City of Costa Mesa, the County of Orange, and the State of California.

6.3 Police Officers: *Currently, only sworn police officers in each city determine which RLC citations to issue. This may take officers away from more critical assignments.*

Response: The City of Costa Mesa disagrees partially with this finding. The Costa Mesa Police Department currently utilizes only sworn police officers to determine which red light camera citations to issue. However, at this time it is the City's contention that sworn police officers are best suited for this function based upon the level of training and experience that sworn police officers possess. There are a variety of factors that should be considered when viewing red light camera video images and determining whether or not to issue a citation. The sworn police officer that has field experience with traffic enforcement, accident investigation, and courtroom testimony is in the best position to make the decision about citation issuance.

Notwithstanding the above paragraph, the Costa Mesa Police Department will continue to explore and re-evaluate the option of utilizing civilian police department employees for various red light camera program functions. This will be particularly important as the City is currently in discussions with our red light camera vendor regarding adding additional approaches to our system.

7. Recommendations

7.1 Camera revenues and unpaid citations: *The five cities in Orange County using RLCs should seek, independently or jointly, to*

resolve accounting/reporting issues so that they can accurately determine the net operating effects of their RLCs and recover any lost revenues.

Response: This recommendation will be implemented. During the past couple of months, the City's Finance Department has been working with the Centralized Accounting Unit of Orange County Superior Court - CJC. The City has requested to be provided with a report to breakdown red light camera revenue by citation. The Court subsequently provided a sample report for red light camera revenue generated exclusively during the month of January 2005. This report was said to have been somewhat labor intensive to produce by the Centralized Accounting Unit staff. While this may be true, it is the City's desire to be able to receive reports of this nature on a monthly basis. As necessary, the City will attempt to facilitate meetings with the appropriate staff from the five cities in Orange County using RLCs in order to develop consistent need requirements that can be presented to the involved courts.

In an effort to improve the percentage of red light camera citations that reach final disposition, the City of Costa Mesa intends to implement an additional procedure that is within an existing policy established by the Executive Committee of the Orange County Superior Court (Title: Filing and Processing of Photo Red Light Citations). The finer points of the procedure are yet to be established between the City of Costa Mesa and the Harbor Justice Center, however, the framework for the procedure is already spelled out in the Court's policy. The purpose of the policy is to address the violators who fail to respond to their red light camera citations. Red light camera citations that involve violators who fail to appear for their scheduled hearing date will be reported back to the originating law enforcement agency 60 days from the filing date of the citation. The issuing agency will perform a Soundex (DMV Driver License photo) photograph comparison of the alleged violator with the driver image captured during the original red light camera violation. In such cases where the Soundex photograph matches the driver's image from the red light camera violation, the issuing agency will return the Soundex photograph along with a signed affidavit (In Support of Request for DMV Hold on Driver License) to the Court. The Court may then process the matter pursuant to California Penal Code Section 1214.1 (Civil assessment for failure to appear).

Should the violator fail to respond to the Court's subsequent notice (CPC 1214.1), the court may impose a \$250 civil assessment, a California Department of Motor Vehicles Driver License hold pursuant to California Vehicle Code Section 40509.5(a) (Notice to Department: Failure to Appear) and submit to the Franchise Tax Board Court-Ordered Debt (FTBCOD) and Franchise Tax Board Tax Intercept (FTBTI).

Note that the above procedure is an additional assessment and not in lieu of the responsibility of the violator to respond to the original red light camera citation. The procedure will certainly create an additional

workload for the staff of the Court and the originating law enforcement agency. It is anticipated that implementation of the procedure will reduce the loss of red light camera citation revenue to the City of Costa Mesa, the County of Orange, and the State of California.

Timeframe: The City expects to be able to implement this recommendation within the next 12 months.

7.2 Police Officers: *The five cities in Orange County using RLCs should explore the possibility of training and using non-sworn law enforcement personnel for the task of determining which RLC citations to issue to reduce costs and return sworn officers to more critical assignments.*

Response: The recommendation has been implemented. The City of Costa Mesa has explored the possibility of utilizing civilian law enforcement personnel for the task of determining which RLC citations to issue. The Costa Mesa Police Department utilizes only sworn police officers to determine which red light camera citations to issue. At this time it is the City's contention that sworn police officers are best suited for this function based upon the level of training and experience that sworn police officers possess. There are a variety of factors that should be considered when viewing red light camera video images and determining whether or not to issue a citation. The sworn police officer that has field experience with traffic enforcement, accident investigation, and courtroom testimony is in the best position to make the decision about citation issuance.

Notwithstanding the above paragraph, the Costa Mesa Police Department will continue to explore and re-evaluate the option of utilizing civilian police department employees for various red light camera program functions. This will be particularly important as the City is currently in discussions with our red light camera vendor regarding adding additional approaches to our system.

It is our sincere hope that the foregoing responses sufficiently addressed the issues that emerged from the Grand Jury report. If you desire any additional information, please contact Lt. Tom Curtis, Traffic Safety Bureau Commander, at (714) 754-5191.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED:

None.

FISCAL REVIEW:

Approval of the letter of response in regard to the findings and recommendations of the Fiscal Year 2004-2005 Orange County Grand Jury report, "Red Light Cameras: Automated Traffic Cops in Orange County", does not require a fiscal review.

However, if the Orange County Superior Court policy is implemented, notifying the City of citations that are over 60 days past the filing date and further action is taken on these citations, then City should see an increase in red light camera revenue.

LEGAL REVIEW:

The City Attorney's Office has reviewed the letter of response and approved it as to form and content.

CONCLUSION:

Staff recommends approval of the attached letter of response in regard to the 2004-2005 Orange County Grand Jury report.

TOM A. CURTIS
Traffic Safety Bureau Commander

JOHN D. HENSLEY
Chief of Police

MARC R. PUCKETT
Director of Finance

KIMBERLY HALL BARLOW
City Attorney

DISTRIBUTION: City Manager
City Attorney
Finance Director
City Clerk

ATTACHMENTS: 1 [Letter of response from City of Costa](#)
2 [O.C. Grand Jury letter to Chief of Police](#)
3 [2004-2005 Orange County Grand Jury report, Red Light Cameras Automated Traffic Cops in Orange County.](#)