

Opinion

# Red light cameras could save kids' lives

New Jersey has a workable plan under way to make driving safer for everyone who uses our roads, but two collisions this March indicate the hard work is just beginning.

The crashes occurred in Old Bridge and National Park. Both events involved private vehicles and school buses.

In both crashes, police cited the passenger car driver for running a red light.

In both events, the red-light runner was uninjured, which is typical of red-light running collisions, two-thirds of the time, the offender is not among the injured or dead.

The driver and nine students — third and fourth graders from Green-Fields Elementary School in West Deptford Township — were taken to the hospital from the bus in National Park. Three of them complained of back and neck pain.

The outcome was better in the Old Bridge crash, where the school van driver took evasive

action to avoid a T-bone collision.

The van driver was injured, but the passengers — an adult and two students — were uninjured. The passenger vehicle ripped the nose off the school van (which is considered a handicapped/disabled vehicle), but, miraculously, the car's driver was uninjured. The impact gave the little boy in the car a bloody nose.

The injuries to the students could have been much worse had New Jersey's legislators not voted years ago to require seat belts in school vehicles for all passengers.

It took 20 years of wrangling before that law passed in 1992. More recently, state lawmakers championed traffic safety again when they initiated a five-year, red-light safety camera pilot program.

Twenty-five localities can participate in the program, but another 40 have submitted applications to be a part of it.

Considering the above snap-

New Jersey's intersections safer, and it won't be easy. With or without signals, intersections are dangerous places.

In 2010, about 34 percent of all crashes on state, county and city roads in New Jersey occurred at intersections, causing 23,500 injuries and 131 deaths, according to the state department of transportation. That's more than 35 percent of all traf-

shot of what happens to the youngest of those among us on the road, is it any wonder why our communities are interested in cameras as a solution to red-light running?  
We have work to do to make

fic injuries and 25 percent of all fatalities for the year.  
Red-light safety cameras can lower those numbers. They reduce red-light running violations and save lives.

According to a 2011 report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, red-light safety cameras in major U.S. cities reduced

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fatalities by 24 percent. Crashes involving injuries were reduced by up to 30 percent in some locations.

Here in New Jersey, the effectiveness of the cameras can be seen in the decrease of crashes at the intersections where the cameras were installed.

In 2010, the first full year that the cameras were operating, there was a 45 percent decrease in the total number of automobile collisions at the intersections where the cameras were installed.

How is this possible? The cameras change driver behavior. People drive differently when they know a police officer is watching. If you don't believe me, just ask yourself:

Do you speed up or slow down when a police officer is nearby?

When a driver runs a red light, the cameras snap photos and

record a brief video of the event. Police review the photographic evidence and decide if a ticket is warranted.

For officers, it's just like being there, except it's a safer and more efficient process for police and less costly to taxpayers.

For drivers, the cameras are a reminder that the law requires them to stop on red.

In St. Louis and other cities, drivers typically change their behavior after one ticket.

Red-light cameras were not installed at the intersections where passenger cars plowed into school buses in Old Bridge and National Park in March, but there were traffic signals.

The bus drivers trusted the green light.

The children aboard those buses did so as well. Let's put safety back into the green light and begin now to ask our legislators to expand the red-light safety camera program in New Jersey.

Gordon Johnson is a State Assemblyman representing the