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## Red-light cameras help save lives

Last year the Pennsylvania General Assembly passed legislation authorizing the use of red-light safety cameras in 13 communities throughout the state. In Montgomery County this includes: Abington Township, Horsham Township, Lower Merion Township, Lower Providence Township, Montgomery Township, Norristown, Upper Dublin Township and Upper Merion Township.

This can be a positive thing for Montgomery County drivers because red-light safety programs bring significant benefits to the communities where they are deployed. By helping to change driver behavior, they make roads safer and act as a valuable tool to help local law enforcement achieve enhanced road safety. Police officers who used to have to sit and monitor an intersection can now increase their patrols in neighborhoods where they're needed, relying on the cameras to catch red-light runners.

A study from the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety (IIHS), found that

red-light safety cameras reduced traffic fatalities in cities where they were deployed by 24 percent. Across the country, more than 50 lives were saved in 14 major U.S. cities over a five-year period. Each year, nearly 700 people are killed and more than 100,000 are injured in red-light running related collisions. Red-light cameras can help prevent reduce the most deadly and most common type of red-light running related collision, the "T-bone" or side impact crash.

In Pennsylvania, the state Transportation Advisory Committee report shows "substantial overall safety benefits" from Philadelphia's red light program, with red-light running violations down an average of 48 percent after 12 months and total crashes down 24 percent for the 10 intersections with three years of data.

Red-light camera programs are completely red-light runner funded. The law allows local governments to recuperate only the operating costs for red-light programs. Once the costs are paid, any

remaining revenue is sent to PennDOT for distribution among communities statewide. The money does not stay locally, which ensures these safety devices are not used to generate revenue but can only be used for safety enhancements.

In fact, PennDOT distributes this funding among communities statewide under its competitive Automated Red Light Enforcement (ARLE) grant program. This funding goes to projects all over the state that improve safety, enhance mobility, or reduce congestion. Despite not having cameras, many communities in Montgomery County have already benefitted from this money including Lansdale, which received \$216,000 for a signal system modernization project. Also, Lower Merion Township received \$250,000 for an adaptive signal system for five intersections. And Upper Merion Township got more than \$85,000 for an Adaptive Traffic Control System at two intersections.

And, while there are many apparent benefits to having red-light cameras

in our neighborhoods, there are also some concerns that need to be addressed including studies that show a reported increase in rear-end crashes from nervous motorists trying not to trigger the camera; the chance that towns won't investigate underlying problems at an intersection (such as pedestrian patterns) that might affect traffic flow; tying traffic penalties to a license plate instead of to a specific driver, and the inevitable increase in insurance premiums.

So, whether cameras come to your community or not, the facts are simple: Red means stop. And running a red light is illegal. Whenever a red light is run, it puts not only the driver but other motorists, pedestrians and cyclists in danger, too.

A special thanks to Charlie Territo, Vice President of Communications at American Traffic Solutions ([www.atsol.com](http://www.atsol.com)) for his help in preparing this column.

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