

Keep red-light cameras, but fix law

By Sun Sentinel Editorial Board

September 23, 2013

Like motorists who blow through red lights, the ill-advised effort to unplug Florida's red-light camera law simply doesn't stop.

Last week, state Senate Transportation Chairman Jeff Brandes filed a measure to repeal the Mark Wandall Traffic Safety Act of 2010. The St. Petersburg Republican's bill likely won't be the last filed to kill the law that allows communities to use red-light cameras.

It should be.

Certainly, there are legitimate complaints over the sometimes ham-fisted deployment of red-light cameras. Boneheaded policies and disjointed application of the law undercut trust in devices that have been shown to save lives.

Rather than abolish the devices, Brandes and his cohorts would better serve Florida motorists by perfecting the existing law.

Two years ago, a report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found these cameras reduce red-light traffic fatalities by 24 percent. The findings echoed a 2012 Florida report that found more than half of 73 police agencies surveyed reported fewer accidents at camera-monitored intersections

Yet among critics, public safety oddly takes a back seat to concern about violators having to pay traffic fines. Red-light cameras "were initially sold as safety devices," Brandes said in a news release, "but I have come to firmly believe that they are now being used as backdoor tax increases."

It's easy to understand how one comes away with that impression. In the most recent budget year, 77 cities and counties collected more than \$62 million from the camera fines, which run \$158 a pop.

It doesn't help that some local governments are sticking it to motorists who dare appeal red-light citations by levying a maximum fee that purports to cover the costs of a new appeals process. At up to \$408 in some venues, that more than doubles the ticket's face value.

Also, it's believed some municipalities are stacking the deck against motorists by shortening yellow-light times or imposing arbitrary standards on right-turn-on-red violations. When

the Legislature reconvenes in the spring, it should address outsized appeal fees and the timing of yellow lights.

Let's fix the snags in the process, but keep the cameras watching dangerous intersections. People behave better when they're being watched. And red-light cameras have been proven to make drivers more cautious and our streets safer.

Copyright © 2013, **South Florida Sun-Sentinel**