

Debate continues over Deerfoot speed cameras

BY JOEL KOM, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 18, 2009

Alberta's Transportation Minister said Wednesday he'd be open to having permanent speed cameras on Deerfoot Trail if police believe it will make the busy roadway safer.

Luke Ouellette said police already have the power to use photo radar from their vehicles to nab speeding drivers.

But if they think permanent radar posted along the highway will drop the collision rate, as a draft report on Deerfoot safety concluded, he wouldn't stand in their way.

"If they said it was safe, (if) they feel it can help them police, I don't have a problem with that," he told the Herald.

Ouellette said he'd also want provincial officials to sign off on the locations for permanent speeding cameras, saying he wouldn't want the radar to become a safety hazard itself.

Ouellette's comments open the door for permanent cameras on Deerfoot because the province has the final say on whether they're introduced.

Even if the City of Calgary wanted them, the move would need legislative change at the provincial level because speed cameras are currently only allowed at intersections and because Deerfoot is a provincial road.

The preliminary findings of the Deerfoot safety audit, a joint Calgary-Alberta review that cost around \$270,000, suggested installing the cameras at several key points along the highway.

Intersections along Deerfoot Trail held seven of the 10 top collision spots in 2007, including the top four positions. Those included Memorial Drive, the location in the city with the most collisions that year, Glenmore Trail, 16th Avenue North, 17th Avenue South, Peigan Trail, Southland Drive and McKnight Boulevard.

The city will be consulting with Calgary police about whether the permanent cameras are a good idea, but a city committee heard Wednesday that officials already support bringing fixed radar to Deerfoot.

Troy McLeod, the city's manager of traffic engineering, told the committee cities in Australia and the Netherlands had seen up to a 40 per cent drop in collisions after installing the cameras.

Other Canadian cities have seen 20 per cent falls in speed camera pilot projects, he said.

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart said she will be making overtures to the province to bring in the cameras.

"It's a first, but when you have a road like Deerfoot, 42 kilometres that cuts the city in half with 92 access points, it's worth looking at," she said. "I will lobby hard to change the legislation."

But Ald. Andre Chabot won't be doing the same, saying he considers the cameras a cash grab that do less to boost safety than having officers pull people over and give them demerit points.

Putting cameras on Deerfoot, he said, could lead to cameras on other provincial highways, and that's something the province might want to think twice about.

"Where does it end?" he said. "Will there just be special conditions here for (Deerfoot)?"

Calgary-McCall MLA Darshan Kang said he backed the cameras' installation, but added there were some aspects that concerned him.

"Once people know the cameras are there, sure they're going to slow down, and then after the camera it'll be pedal to the metal," he said.

Other measures recommended by the safety review include dedicating a police unit to enforcing Deerfoot, pacing traffic at on-ramps to keep the traffic levels on the highway manageable, and giving police the authority to get cars in a minor collision towed right away.

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