

Speed targeted in safety review ; \$7M plan calls for photo radar, tougher police enforcement

BY JOEL KOM, CALGARY HERALD MARCH 14, 2009

Permanent speed cameras should be placed along Deerfoot Trail and police should consider lowering their ticketing thresholds to boost safety on Calgary's busiest road, a draft of a safety audit's final phase recommends.

Those were just two of the \$7 million worth of proposals from a long-awaited report ordered in the wake of concerns over lead-footed drivers on Deerfoot Trail.

The consultants' report, part of a joint Calgary-Alberta review heading to a city committee next week for comment before it's finalized, makes recommendations ranging from better signage to dropping suggested speeds on curves.

But the suggestions that could most affect drivers are the calls for permanent fixed speed cameras and possibly lowering the speed at which tickets are handed out.

Those moves coupled with education campaigns will bolster the Deerfoot's reputation as a "continuously enforced corridor," which would in turn make the road safer, the report says.

Those two proposals are already drawing conflicting opinions from the two aldermen who wanted the review.

Proposed road rules:

speed cameras;

consider lowering ticket thresholds;

ramps and the road; drop the suggested

speed on certain curves.

Ald. Andre Chabot said cameras are nothing more than a cash grab. Real enforcement, he said, is done by police officers in vehicles with radar guns.

"Pull people over, impact their trips, make the point to them," he said, adding people quickly wise up to cameras' locations. "They'll become cognizant of those places after a while, and guess what, they'll speed everywhere but there."

Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, however, favoured cameras, especially if the ticketing benchmark was

dropped. Asking officers to do the ticketing on the side of the busy road could put them in more peril, she said.

"Deerfoot is already dangerous, not only from a driver's point of view, but from an officer's point of view."

The report pegs the cost of the cameras at around \$240,000. But before a penny can be spent on them, the province would have to change legislation to allow them.

Speeding cameras are currently only allowed at intersections, such as the controversial speed-on-green cameras recently introduced by the provincial government.

Troy McLeod, the city's manager of traffic engineering, said some cities have found that cameras that indiscriminately hand out tickets have improved road safety.

"They really make people drive the speed limit," he said.

As for lowering the threshold that needs to be crossed before police hand out tickets -- a speed generally higher than the posted limit -- McLeod said that's something that would have to be discussed with Calgary police.

Alberta Transportation spokesman Jerry Bellikka said the province has yet to decide whether to act on the camera and ticketing proposals.

"It's a recommendation," he said. "It doesn't mean we'll accept it. It's something the city and the province will have to look at to decide what we do with it."

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.

Around 182,000 vehicles a day travel on Deerfoot Trail's busiest point around 16th Avenue North.

This latest safety report was the third phase of a review that took more than year. A final report on the 50-kilometre stretch of Deerfoot is expected within the next couple months.

The report made 69 recommendations in all, almost half of them based on improvements at 32nd Avenue North, 16th Avenue North, Memorial Drive, 17th Avenue South and Glenmore Trail. Other suggestions included dedicating a police enforcement unit to the road, erecting more traffic cameras to monitor traffic flow and creating legislation that would see the city or province tow away vehicles from minor collisions as quickly as possible.

Colley-Urquhart said the \$7 million price tag, which is only based on relatively quick and cheap improvements, is evidence enough of Deerfoot's safety threats. "There's some easy fixes here that don't cost an arm and a leg, but there are also things we need to absolutely invest in," she said.

Chabot, meanwhile, said the report did nothing to address the root causes of Deerfoot's troubles, including traffic bottlenecks and too few lanes in some areas.

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