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## Talk of using red-light cameras to slap lead-footed drivers with careless driving tickets sparks political debate

By [MICHAEL PLATT](#)

This isn't a case of protecting the idiot who sails through a red light with his foot hard on the gas.

If anything, a \$400 careless driving penalty is too lenient for those who endanger others with a 1,300-kg weapon: With 92 Albertans killed in intersection wrecks in 2007, a charge of attempted murder would seem more apt.

Instead, what we have is a battle of wills between Calgary's police brass and their political bosses.



Calgary's police want to use red-light cameras at 40 city intersections to lay careless driving charges; the province says no way.

"Police don't make the laws, we make the laws," said Alberta Transport Minister Luke Ouellette.

Though Alberta allows police to use cameras to lay fines for speeding, and running red lights, Ouellette said careless driving is a fine too far.

"There's no law for police to charge them under if they don't have the guy's driver's licence in their hand," he said.

The controversy comes weeks before police in Alberta use red-light cameras to issue signal infractions and speeding violations.

Under "Speed on Green" legislation supported by Ouellette's department, drivers who speed through intersections on a green light are fined, and drivers who run red lights are fined.

Those who do both should get two tickets -- but not in Calgary, where police now say they will issue only one fine for a double infraction.

Calgary Traffic Sgt. Clive Marsh says drivers who run red lights while speeding will get a careless driving charge, worth a \$400 fine.

"I've always said that if there is evidence of unreasonable speed, that a vehicle is travelling too fast through a red light, I would consider laying that charge," said Marsh, of the Specialized Traffic Enforcement Unit.

"We would only consider it under very serious circumstances -- perhaps 1% of drivers."

Drivers will also be fined for speeding on green and yellow, and for running reds.

But doing both will only result in a single careless driving ticket, contrary to provincial legislation.

Marsh said that without evidence to identify the driver, the careless driving charge would be laid against the registered owner of the vehicle.

The stance places Calgary police officials in the hot seat with their political bosses.

It's because they're not only enforcing the law, they now appear to be interpreting it, too.

Ouellette said the serious charges of careless driving goes beyond the scope of policing by camera.

Real police officers are needed to stop drivers deemed dangerous enough to warrant a careless charge, he said.

"They couldn't win one of them (tickets) in court," the minister said.

"They cannot go out and ticket a car if there's not a police officer there doing the job," he said.

Step down, in other words -- only Calgary's police aren't budging, and Marsh said the careless driving crackdown will go ahead as planned.

"I have no comment about what the minister says," said Marsh.

That the issue is headed towards further confrontation is guaranteed -- a spokesman with the minister's office said a sit-down meeting with Calgary police brass will be ordered forthwith.

It won't be the only political front where the police will be battling -- Ald. Diane Colley-Urquhart, who sits on the Police Commission, is also demanding an explanation from city police.

"We need to use the red light cameras for what they were intended -- I'm not convinced that a camera issuing a ticket for careless driving to the owner of the vehicle would stand up in court," said Colley-Urquhart.

"Careless driving is a very serious charge and I would have thought that a police officer would need to consider a number of things before issuing a ticket."

Colley-Urquhart said she worries that when police start interpreting the law, it could open the door to using the cameras for law-enforcement that was never intended.

"What's next, using them to charge people who haven't a registered or insured vehicle?" she said.

