



San Mateo Ceases Red-Light Camera Program

Decision Prompted by Isolated Yellow Light Timing Error, Reduced Safety Benefits

San Mateo, CA – Like many communities across the nation, the City of San Mateo has decided to cease operations of its red-light camera program. This decision was prompted by the discovery of an error in yellow light timing at one approach to an intersection, followed by a thorough evaluation of the program that determined the safety benefits of this labor-intensive program have plateaued over the years.

As soon as staff became aware of the timing issue in May 2019, the error was immediately corrected and the City suspended all automated photo enforcement activity throughout San Mateo. The City began an investigation of who was affected and undertook a comprehensive review of the program to evaluate its overall effectiveness.

The investigation determined the timing error was isolated to a camera monitoring drivers heading south on Saratoga Drive at the Hillsdale Boulevard intersection between Dec. 4, 2018 and May 20, 2019. The error occurred during a construction project when the yellow light timing was inadvertently set to 3.4 seconds, 0.2 seconds short of the state-mandated minimum 3.6 seconds. As a result, the City will be dismissing or refunding the 985 citations issued at this singular approach during that time. Those citations have been identified and the drivers who were affected will be contacted directly by the City. With the exception of citations issued at southbound Saratoga Drive approaching Hillsdale Boulevard between Dec. 4, 2018 and May 20, 2019, all other citations for photo enforcement violations in San Mateo remain valid.

Safety remains the top priority for the City and the decision to end the program was made after the evaluation found the overall safety benefits have plateaued since San Mateo began automated photo enforcement in 2005. The evaluation looked at years of data in San Mateo, including the number of citations issued at intersections with automated enforcement and citywide rates of red light collisions. Furthermore, significant resources are needed to operate this complex program and legislative changes have made it harder to successfully issue citations the courts will uphold.

In considering the overall effect these cameras were having, the evaluation found public safety citywide is no longer significantly improved by a program that has become more challenging to administer.

“We are doing everything possible to remedy the situation for those who were affected by this recent error,” said City Manager Drew Corbett. “I want to emphasize public safety is our top priority and this decision was not made lightly. These cameras are simply not having the same effect on improving drivers’ behaviors as they once were. We believe focusing our efforts on uniformed patrols and education will have a greater benefit to our community.”

For any questions regarding citations received through San Mateo’s Automated Photo Enforcement Program, call 650-522-7728 or visit www.cityofsanmateo.org

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