

**Stimulus Material: GED Ready® - RLA**

**Automated Traffic Lights**

Speech: Proposal for Automatic Traffic Light Cameras  
by Councilman Lorenzo Hart  
Baler Town Council meeting

Fellow council members:

- 1      The cuts to this year's budget mean that fewer funds are available for many town departments. We must thoughtfully examine how to use our resources most effectively. I propose installing automatic traffic light cameras at 10 major intersections in town.
- 2      Clearly, monitoring intersections is a public safety concern that lends itself to technology. Automatic traffic cameras photograph the license plates of automobiles running red lights. The town then sends traffic tickets to the violators. Automating this process will allow our police officers to focus on duties that require human attention, saving the cost of hiring additional officers.
- 3      Beyond the practical advantage, automatic traffic cameras have well-documented benefits. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration states that running red lights causes hundreds of traffic fatalities and thousands of injuries annually. According to a 2010 report by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, red-light cameras have lowered these numbers in hundreds of U.S. cities. A 2005 Federal Highway Administration study found a 25% decrease in front-into-side auto accidents in seven cities that use red-light cameras.
- 4      Currently, drivers who get away with red-light violations tend to repeat the behavior, making intersections less safe overall. Automatic cameras discourage this habit. A 2009 study of a program in Montgomery County, Maryland, showed an average 78% decline in the number of red-light tickets issued after the cameras had operated for a year. Only about one-third of the drivers who each received a red-light violation ticket repeated the violation within a two-year period.
- 5      In addition, by citing violators who may have gone unpunished without the assistance of the cameras, our town would increase revenue through additional traffic fines. A single intersection in Lawrence Township, New Jersey, generated over \$1 million in fines in only one year. The facts show that an investment in these cameras pays for itself. Please support this proposal.

Letter to the Editor: Automatic Cameras Not an Automatic Solution

Baler Herald

April 8

- 6 The town council's proposal to install 10 automatic red-light cameras at traffic lights is a proposal to waste money. I have scrutinized the details and calculated the costs. The proposal does say that the company AutoCamera Inc. has promised to waive installation fees that would normally run \$50,000–\$100,000 per intersection. However, that same company will charge us \$5,000–\$6,000 *each month per camera* to operate and maintain the cameras. That is at least \$60,000 per year for *one camera*. Installing 10 cameras will have quite a high price tag. Six hundred thousand dollars per year could instead pay the salaries of new officers.
- 7 These cameras create other unexpected costs as well. In New Jersey and New York, several cities have been sued over the timing of traffic lights with automatic cameras. Plaintiffs often contend that the yellow lights are illegally short and that required inspections of the cameras were not performed. Lawsuits over automatic cameras are all too common, occurring also in states such as Ohio, Illinois, Missouri, and California. In a single December in New Jersey alone, traffic light company ATS settled 16 separate class-action lawsuits. Because we cannot control public reaction to these cameras, the real costs are hidden. Any new fines collected may pale in comparison to increased legal fees.
- 8 Additionally, the safety benefits of automatic red-light cameras are unclear. A 2005 National Highway Traffic Safety Administration report says that some cities using the cameras have seen a decrease in front-into-side accidents, but rear-end collisions have increased. Apparently, speeding drivers notice the cameras at the last minute. They apply their brakes abruptly, surprising the unsuspecting drivers behind them and causing accidents. These additional collisions are avoidable if we reject this proposal.
- 9 In every way, actual traffic police officers are superior to automatic red-light cameras. The only investment we need to make is hiring more officers.

Madison Caan, civil engineer  
Baler

**Prompt**

Analyze the arguments presented in the speech and the letter to the editor.

In your response, develop an argument in which you explain how one position is better supported than the other. Incorporate relevant and specific evidence from both sources to support your argument.

Remember, the better-argued position is not necessarily the position with which you agree. This task should take approximately 45 minutes to complete.