



SB 720 – Safer Streets Act *Reforming California's Red Light Traffic Enforcement System*

SUMMARY

SB 720 creates an opt-in program, called the Safer Streets Program, for local governments to utilize an automated red light traffic enforcement system. Revenue generated by the Safer Streets Program will be utilized for safer streets initiatives, including pedestrian, cyclist, and vehicle safety improvements.

BACKGROUND

In 2021 alone, 4,258 Californians lost their lives to traffic collisions. Over a quarter of these deaths occurred due to drivers who ran red lights.¹

Automated traffic enforcement systems improve driver behavior. A study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety found that in large cities across the nation, red light traffic systems reduced fatal red light running crash rate by over 20%.²

Unlike other states, California holds the driver responsible for violations, requiring photos of the driver's face.³ If the driver cannot be identified, the violation notice is sent to the vehicle's registered owner. Since there is no legal requirement for the owner to respond, thousands of violators go unaccounted for every year.

If identified, violators are subject to a criminal penalty, which includes a fine upwards of \$500 and a point on their driver's license. Disputing a citation requires violators to go to court, which can be a long and expensive process. The high fees associated with current red light traffic enforcement systems can create a significant financial burden for all families, but especially low-income families.

THE PROBLEM

California's red light traffic enforcement system has not been updated since 1995, and contains several outdated features. It captures photos of the driver, raising concerns regarding data collection and storage, and imposes one of the highest fines in the country, up to \$500.

Additionally, in some red light camera programs, it has been found that the cameras are often placed in neighborhoods with predominantly Black and Latino populations, raising equity concerns with already marginalized communities.⁴

Difficulties in enforcing and recouping funds under the current system have forced many cities to abandon their programs, worsening road safety for pedestrians, cyclists, and drivers. Traffic fatalities have risen across California in recent years, with over 4,000 people dying on our roadways in 2021 alone.⁵ Unfortunately, California now ranks in the top five states in the nation for fatal crashes.

THE SOLUTION

SB 720 creates an opt-in program for cities to utilize a new red light camera system to support pedestrian safety measures in an equitable manner.

This bill seeks to make roads safer by:

- Shifts the program from driver liability to owner liability.
- Changes the violation from a criminal penalty to a civil penalty, thereby easing insurance prices for drivers.
- Limits the fine for a violation to \$100, including administrative fees.

If a local government chooses to opt into the Safer Streets Program, they must:

- Develop guidelines for screening and issuing violations.
- Develop guidelines for selecting the location of to install these systems, based upon traffic data and public safety.
- Submit an annual report on data from the automated traffic enforcement system.

SB 720 also introduces an alternative system to contest a violation, shifting the appeal process from

¹ [Governors Highway Safety Association](#)

² [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety \(IIHS\)](#)

³ [IIHS](#)

⁴ [ProPublica](#)

⁵ [CA Office of Traffic Safety](#)

the court system to an administrative hearing conducted by local governments. This will ease the burden on the courts and decrease the costs on individuals.

Revenues from the Safer Streets Program will be invested back in our communities by constructing and expanding traffic-calming measures, including creating bicycle lanes, speed tables, raised crosswalks, and curb extensions.

SUPPORT

- Streets are For Everyone (Co-Sponsor)
- Sacramento Bike Advocates (SABA) (Co-Sponsor)
- Streets for All (Co-Sponsor)
- Active San Gabriel Valley
- Bicycle Solutions
- Bike LA
- Bike Long Beach
- Bike Sunnyvale
- Bike SLO County
- Car-Lite Long Beach
- Circulate San Diego
- City of Sacramento
- City of San Diego
- Consumers for Auto Reliability & Safety
- Costa Mesa Alliance for Better Streets
- East Bay for Everyone
- Families for Safe Streets San Diego
- Livable Communities Initiative
- Los Angeles Neighborhood Initiative
- Los Angeles Walks
- Move LA
- Move Santa Barbara County
- Mujeres de La Tierra
- Norwalk Unides
- Pasadena Complete Streets Coalition
- People for Bikes
- San Diego County Bicycle Coalition
- San Francisco Bicycle Coalition
- Santa Monica Families for Safe Streets
- Santa Monica Safe Streets Alliance
- Santa Monica Spoke
- Slow Down Sacramento
- So-Cal Cycling
- Sonoma County Bicycle Coalition
- Strong Towns Artesia
- Strong Towns Santa Barbara

- West Hollywood Bicycle Coalition

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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