

Economic Development Committee

Inquiry into the road safety benefits of fixed
speed cameras

Submission 26

The Research Director
Economic Development Committee
Parliament House, George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

C.Scott Hendry
Private individual
[REDACTED]
Russell Island
Qld, 4184

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I would like to begin by challenging the assumption that speed causes crashes. Speed in and of itself does not cause crashes unless coupled with other factors such as driver inattention, poor road design or maintenance or mechanical failure of the vehicle. Any attempt to reduce crash numbers on a widespread and permanent basis by focusing on only one factor is doomed to failure. That failure should not then be used to justify increases in the extent of the focus on that one factor.

The current proposal to increase the number of automated speed cameras illustrates this point. Increasing the number of such cameras will not change driver behaviour on either a widespread or permanent basis. The effects of these cameras are at best, localised and temporary. Furthermore, increasing the number of cameras does nothing to address the issues of faulty road design, inadequate road capacity, lack of road maintenance, driver intoxication, driver inattention or vehicular mechanical failure. Of the factors that can contribute to a crash, speed is a significant, but minor player. The most important cause of road crashes, in the author's opinion, is inadequate road capacity for traffic volume. Simple statistics show that as the vehicular density on any section of road increases, so does the probability of two or more vehicles intersecting. The single most effective method of reducing road crashes is for road capacities to be maintained at adequate levels for the expected traffic volumes. In light of this, the increase in the number of speed cameras, whether fixed or mobile, is and will always be seen to be, simply a means to increase revenue through fines.

Issues for comment:

1. **What is the appropriate role for fixed speed cameras in enforcing speed limits in Queensland?**

The role for fixed speed cameras is that they will only affect driver behaviour in the camera's immediate vicinity and only temporarily.

2. Does prominent speed camera signage promote a safer road speed environment?

In a word, no.

3. How effective are the existing fixed speed cameras in decreasing crash risks and changing driver behaviour in Queensland?

In the author's opinion, speed cameras are only effective in the immediate vicinity of the camera. It could also be argued that focusing a driver's attention on their speed to the exclusion of other factors could actually increase the risk of a crash.

4. What criteria should be used to select fixed speed camera sites?

The rate of crashes per thousand vehicular passes at the site. The same criteria should also trigger an examination of other possible crash causes at the site such as inadequate road design, capacity or maintenance.

5. Are fixed speed cameras more suited to specific road environments?

Speed cameras are not an effective strategy for reducing road crashes and as such are not suited for any road environment. Experience in the United States has shown that where communities have forced the removal of speed cameras it has had little to no effect on crash rates, but did impact on revenue.

6. Will the roll-out of new speed detection technology lead to excessive monitoring of Queensland drivers' speed?

Since driver behaviour is only affected in the immediate vicinity of the camera, to affect a widespread change in driver behaviour would require a speed camera at approximately 2Klm intervals on every road in the state. Would that be excessive monitoring? The author thinks it would. The existing number of cameras is already excessive, so yes, any increase would be excessive monitoring.

7. Are there other technologies that would be more appropriate for reducing crash risk associated with excessive speed?

Yes. Increased police patrols would modify driver behaviour on a permanent and widespread basis. Road capacities adequate for traffic volumes would reduce the crash risks associated with excessive speed. Properly maintained and designed roads would reduce the crash risks even further.

8. Are there other issues regarding the use of fixed speed cameras to reduce road related risks in Queensland?

To the motoring public, speed cameras either fixed or mobile, are a very high cost low benefit option for reducing road risks. The author has observed that driver behaviour only changes in the vicinity of the speed camera. Fixed cameras will do absolutely nothing to alter driver behaviour in areas devoid of the cameras.

Regards

C. Scott Hendry