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Get caught on camera running a red light in Brick? That'll be \$85

Brick ready to install cameras

By [MARGARET F. BONAFIDE](#) • STAFF WRITER • November 15, 2009

Running a red light is about to become a riskier proposition in Brick, with cameras soon to be snapping photos and shooting video of violators at two accident-heavy intersections.

The digital images — to be taken at the Chambers Bridge Road intersections with Route 70 and Brick Boulevard — will be posted on the Web, where the vehicle's registered owner will be able to view them and decide whether to pay or dispute the violation, which carries an \$85 price tag.

Brick will be the first municipality in Monmouth or Ocean counties to use what are called red light running cameras, an emerging technology credited with helping reduce serious crashes but criticized by some as a potential money grab. Brick has not announced a launch date, but camera poles have been mounted at the Brick Boulevard intersection, said Brick Police Capt. John E. Rein Jr.

"The jury is in, and red light cameras are very effective in not only reducing red-light running violations but also reducing crashes," said Russ Rader, spokesman for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

New Jersey launched the Red Light Running Automated Enforcement pilot program last year, joining 24 other states and the District of Columbia in using red-light cameras, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

The state Department of Transportation giving municipalities the right to use the technology. Brick and Stafford applied for the program and were accepted, although Stafford now has decided not to participate. No Monmouth County towns applied, according to the DOT.

Federal studies show the cameras reduce right-angle collisions. According to the insurance institute, a decade's worth of studies show they also reduce violations by 40 to 50 percent and injuries from crashes by 25 to 30 percent.

Brick averages 150 crashes a year at the two intersections, where two photos and a 12-second video of violators will be shot by the cameras, which have yet to go up, township officials said.

"The ultimate goal of the program is to save lives, injuries and property," said Brick police Chief Nils R. Bergquist.

"The red-light cameras are designed to prevent the high-speed, side-impact crashes that kill people," said Rader of the highway safety institute.

But in Brick, they will also monitor right-turn-on-red violators and make walking safer for pedestrians who have the right-of-way, Bergquist said.

"A right turn on red is a high risk to pedestrians because most motorists only look to the left," the chief

said.

Justino Santiago, 27, of Manasquan, agreed that walking across Chambers Bridge Road at Route 70 is hazardous, with cars turning right on red there.

"When I am in a hurry to cross, I look, but if I don't see a car, I go," said Santiago, who says he has been nearly struck several times.

Ronika Eckart, 22, of Point Pleasant is in favor of the cameras coming to New Jersey.

"I don't have a problem" with them, she said. "I think they really work" at making people stop for red lights.

But some studies show the cameras can initially cause a slight increase in rear-end collisions.

Rader said those claims are unfounded. Rear-end collisions, usually fender benders, go up at any intersection where a change is implemented in the road pattern or where a traffic signal is added, he said.

Other critics say the cameras can be just moneymakers, said David Weinstein, spokesman for AAA Mid-Atlantic Region.

They should only be installed at intersections with a history of crashes, Weinstein said.

"There is a lot of money in red-light cameras," Weinstein said. "That is why AAA keeps a real eye on the cameras to make sure that the municipality keeps its eye on safety and not the municipal coffers."

On Election Day this month, the technology got the boot in townships in Ohio and Texas, where voters ousted speed-monitoring and red-light running cameras.

There is a "grass-roots effort nationwide that is legitimate" to remove red-light cameras being used to ramp up municipal revenue, Weinstein said.

In addition to Brick, Newark and East Brunswick are closest to using the system in New Jersey, said Winnie Comfort, director of communications for the New Jersey Administrative Office of the Courts.

State municipal courts are "ready to go," in terms of dealing with the violations, she said.

Newark has requested approval from the DOT for 22 red-light camera intersections.

The city will be starting a state-required 30-day period where motorists who run red lights at two approved intersections will be mailed a warning summons. City officials plan to "go live," sending out real summonses by Dec. 16, said Jack M. Nata of the Division of Traffic and Signals.

Newark and Brick are using two companies, both based in Arizona, who are the leading vendors in the United States. Brick chose American Traffic Solutions as its camera vendor and Newark is using Redflex Traffic Systems.

State law requires changes for intersections where the cameras will be used. The duration of the yellow light will be extended and signs must be posted warning motorists that the cameras are in use.

Running a red light is a two-point violation if witnessed and cited by a police officer in person, according to the state law. Violations issued via a red light camera will not put any points on the driver's record.

The cameras act as a police "force multiplier," Bergquist said, providing a safe way to ticket a violator without putting an officer at risk.

Assemblyman David W. Wolfe, R-Ocean, who has a legislative office on Route 70, about a half mile from where a camera will be, said he is in favor of them. He believes they will add an extra incentive to

make a full stop before turning right on red.

However, he said, cameras make people nervous.

"When E-ZPass first came in to use people were worried that they would get a speeding ticket if they went through one booth then the next too soon," Wolfe said.

Cameras always spark a few to cry out that such surveillance reeks of Big Brother, Wolfe said. But he believes the public concern over surveillance will wane, as it did with E-ZPass.

HOW MUCH?

In Brick, a summons issued via a red-light camera will carry an \$85 fine, with \$46 going to the town and \$39 to the camera vendor, according to a township ordinance.

Brick's contract with American Traffic Solutions pays the vendor \$36,800 a month from the summonses — or \$38,000 minus \$1,200 to pay municipal court staff to process them. Officials said the township anticipates earning an additional \$40,000 to \$50,000 a month from the cameras.

The camera installation is paid for by the vendor, and estimated at about \$1.2 million or \$150,000 per approach, with four approaches at two intersections, according to a presentation given by the vendor at a Township Council meeting in February.

CRASH STATISTICS

In 2008, the number of people killed in fatal accidents victims fell dramatically, both in New Jersey and nationally, according to a study by the Governors Highway Safety Association and the New Jersey State Police Fatal Accident Investigation Unit.

While national statistics for fatalities declined three years running in 2006, 2007 and 2008, Ocean County has this year already surpassed last year's total of fatalities. To date this year in the county, 54 people died in 49 crashes. In 2008, 38 people died in 37 crashes.

In Monmouth County to date this year, there have been 33 crashes and 33 fatalities, including the latest death reported Friday in Freehold Township.

Monmouth County recorded 45 crashes with 47 fatalities in 2008.

In 2007 Monmouth County recorded 55 traffic fatalities last year, a increase of seven fatalities from 2006, the state police records show.

HOW THEY WORK

Sensors in the roadway tell the camera when a car is about to run a red light. The camera then takes pictures and video of the violation.

The images are previewed by the vendor then sent to the local police department.

A police officer determines if a summons is warranted. If it is, the digital images are posted online and a ticket is mailed to the registered owner of the vehicle, with a private Web link to the images.

In New Jersey, the violation will be a no-points ticket, similar to an E-ZPass violation.

-- By Margaret F. Bonafide