

The use of speed cameras essay



The use of speed cameras has been widely adopted, especially in the developed countries. However, there are different points of view about whether they are really efficient as instruments for reducing the carnage on roads or whether they are just used as cash cows for federal and local governments (Blows 25). Speed cameras also have some other names: road safety camera, photo radar, road rule camera, photo enhancement or Gatso. A speed camera can be defined as a roadside camera that takes a photograph of a vehicle and records its speed to determine whether it is exceeding a speed limit. The device is used to ensure that the drivers obey road rules; failure to keep to the requirements is resulted in a fine. Through the fines, city councils make a tidy sum which can then be used for other activities.

Invented in the 1950s by rally driver Maurice Gatsonides, (hence the name Gatso for the device) speed cameras have been greatly improved with the advance in technology. Gatsonides used the first speed camera to monitor his speed around corners of a race track in order to make his time better. Early road rule cameras used a film to take pictures. The first camera equipped with a radar was utilized on roads in 1971, while the mobile speed traffic camera was introduced in 1982. Digital cameras appeared in the late 1990s, and since then they have been constantly improved. Now the cameras have the ability to capture pictures in several million frames per second. The modem or electronic interface of the device provides automatic connection to a central processing unit. This has considerably increased the importance of the role that the cameras play in catching speeding offenders.

A research done in Britain has shown that the use of speed cameras as a tool for monitoring has significantly reduced the number of traffic injuries and deaths (Adam 87). The findings have proved that speed cameras cut the average speed by 1-15 %. The number of crashes in the surveilled areas decreased by 8-49%, while the fall in fatal accidents was 11-49%. This means that, even though there might be differences in data, speed cameras do reduce injuries and deaths (Blows 47).

A pilot programme, done in Montgomery, revealed that the use of speed cameras lowered the number of accidents, effectively making the neighborhood safer for kids and road workers. Therefore, speed cameras perform their function to catch speeders and hence prevent speeding in the controlled areas (Adam 87). However, the cameras make money purely by default. Slowing people down, they help avoid paying fines rather than prevent accidents.

A good number of drivers argue that speed cameras are not about safety (Muskaug 293). They say that counties and states just want to make more money since speed cameras don't reduce the number of accidents. Speed cameras are seen as a means of making money through the fines that are imposed on the defaulters. In the UK, a lot of Gatsos have been introduced, but the number of accidents has remained almost the same. This shows clearly that devices do not contribute much to reducing accidents. A lot of people believe that speeding is not the main cause of accidents if a person is driving safely. There are warning signs that alert the motorist when he is approaching the areas fitted with speed cameras. The signs induce the driver to slow down, but once this person is out of such a zone, he/ she can

continue speeding. The cameras are usually located in high-income districts and the motorist who lives there can afford to pay the fines. It is often the case that rich people speed as they like.

A former Arizona governor, Janet Napolitano, accurately predicted that Arizona's freeway cameras would generate 90 million dollars for the state profit in 2009 and 34 million dollars for the company involved (John 77). The fact that speed cameras are run by private companies whose driving force is to make higher profits solidifies the thought that speed cameras are a profit making endeavor. The companies issue many fines to increase and sustain their profit. Several people have reported being fined illegally due to mistaken identity or other causes (Muskaug 343).

In 1995, the use of speed cameras was cancelled in Ontario, Canada, after it was realized that the death toll was up to 999 a year. According to Blackburn (147), speed cameras had no effect on drunk drivers, unsafe lane changes, abrupt stoppers and vehicles with serious mechanical defects. Cited as the biggest killers on Ontario roads, these problems can only be stopped by officers on patrol and not the use of speed cameras. The device has been labelled as an instrument that provokes panic breaking. Once a driver realizes that he is in a speed limit area, he/ she gets nervous and this has the potential of causing accidents. Limits are no longer an indication of accidents probability, since drivers can break road rules even when using set speed limits.

It is evident that speed cameras do reduce the speed of the motorist, but only in areas equipped with the cameras (Adam 97). Nevertheless, we

cannot say that reduction of speed equals to decrease in accidents. Motorists reduce their speed in order not to be issued speeding tickets, while their main motive must be to avoid accidents. Moreover, the cameras are placed in small stretches of roads, and not in accident prone areas as should be the case.

I strongly believe that speed cameras are cash cows for local councils, as opposed to their function of reducing the number of road accidents. However, one common fact is that in places with road rule cameras, the motorist lowers the speed, thereby reducing the chances of an accident. Other measures such as police patrols, sound engineering and maintaining a good technical state of vehicles should be explored as a possible alternative to the use of speed cameras. A lot of local authorities around the world have banned the use of speed cameras after realizing that they don't have a direct link to the decrease of road carnage. This is a clear indication that speed cameras do not reduce the number of accidents on the roads.