Countdown Timers on Traffic Signals

HB 2786 by Rep. Craig Fitzhugh
SB 2455 by Sen. Lowe Finney

TSPE and ACEC of Tennessee oppose HB 2786 / SB 2455, which requires countdown timers to be installed at all intersections with unmanned traffic safety cameras installed after July 1, 2012.

Letting the motoring public know how many seconds it will take for a traffic signal to change from green to red will create very unsafe conditions, with drivers speeding up to get through the yellow light, rather than stopping appropriately, resulting in an increase in the number and severity of crashes.

Traffic signals, whether they utilize automated enforcement or not, exist for the purpose of efficiently moving traffic through a signal while providing a reasonable level of safety for both motorists and pedestrians.

The installation, maintenance, and operation of traffic signals is governed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD), which is approved by the Federal Highway Administrator as the National Standard in accordance with Title 23 U.S. Code and is adopted by the State of Tennessee, as required by the Federal Code. The MUTCD states that “Letters or numbers (including those associated with countdown displays) shall not be displayed as part of a vehicular signal indication.” Therefore, the installation of countdown timers adjacent to the traffic signal displays would be in violation of Title 23 of the U.S. Code.

Instead, ACEC of Tennessee and TSPE encourage reliance on decades of experience and research from across the country with traffic signals which has found that yellow and red light timing needs to be determined based on sound and accepted engineering practice to achieve the optimum safety results. Research has determined this to be particularly important at intersections with automated enforcement systems.