

Photo radar works, York police say

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Staff Writers

It may be sneaky, even an invasion of privacy, but critics and proponents of photo radar agree on one thing: It slows drivers down.

And the technology, discarded by the former Tory government soon after it took office in 1995, may be returning soon to a highway near you.

This week, Premier Dalton McGuinty hinted he might revisit the system, in which unmarked vans snapped shots of licence plates on speeding vehicles on 400-series highways. Vehicle owners received their tickets in the mail soon thereafter.

Alan Shefman, a Thornhill human rights consultant and school trustee, said as much as he dislikes the notion of being charged by subterfuge, it has been proven to slow speeders.

"I have a love-hate relationship with photo radar," Mr. Shefman said.

"On one hand, I don't like the secretiveness of it — how they nab you. On the other hand, it does have a dramatic effect on slowing you down."

Staff-Sgt. Tom Carrique, head of York Regional Police's traffic unit, agrees photo radar achieves its purpose.

"It has been statistically proven, during the duration photo radar was used, it did slow down traffic," he said.

Police issued 240,000 tickets and levied \$16 million in fines under the photo radar program in 1994 and '95.

Staff-Sgt. Carrique said allowing police across Ontario to use the technology on municipal roads in addition to provincial highways would nab more speeders and free up officers to patrol for other infractions, including tailgating, bad lane changes and failing to wear seat-belts.

"Depending on how we deploy photo radar, it's going to allow us to provide better coverage," he said.

He suggested the region's major thoroughfares, such as highways 9, 27 and 7, would be ideal locations for photo radar.

York Region's politicians and police board have been asking the province to allow photo radar on local streets for years.

"Once it's on the books, I believe we'd move fairly quickly," regional chairperson Bill Fisch said this week.

If the region can't hire more police officers, photo radar is the only way to get people to reduce their speed, Markham Mayor Don Cousens said.

"I guarantee you the first place we'd put it is near schools and parks," he said, arguing many people feel they are not safe because of speeding on residential streets.

The region can't afford enough police to watch all those problem areas, said Mr. Cousens, who concedes the radar traps would eventually pop up along arterial roads.

The mayor also acknowledged a strong feeling among constituents against photo radar.

Mr. Shefman said the technology should be limited to major provincial highways, where it has proven to be effective in the past.

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