



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

MPP David Caplan has tabled legislation to allow safety cameras in school and construction zones.

Safety cameras could monitor school, construction zones

Children considered especially vulnerable at busy intersections

BY JOE FANTAUZZI
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Smile, you're on safety camera.

Or, you will be, if private member's legislation, to be tabled Monday by MPP David Caplan, passes into law.

It would allow stationary cameras to be placed in school and construction zones, as well as near senior citizens' homes.

Municipalities would decide where the cameras would go, Mr. Caplan said, noting police can't be at every school zone or construction zone.

The proposal is different from the provincial photo radar, loathed by drivers following its introduction in the 1990s, Mr. Caplan said. His bill does not call for unmarked vans snapping photos of speeding drivers. Instead, the areas in which cameras are placed would be clearly marked.

Under the bill, demerit points would not be attached to fines.

The proposal is not about increasing revenues for the province, rather slowing down drivers, Mr. Caplan said, adding he hopes the program pays for itself.

The placement of cameras in areas with many pedestrians, such as construction or school zones, made sense to York Regional Police Chief Armand La Barge.

He supports fining drivers, but for the cameras to be effective, demerit points or the loss of driving privileges should be included, he said.

Chief La Barge said he often sees students crossing busy intersections wearing iPods or talking on cellphones.

Children are especially vulnerable as they are not always looking out for themselves, he said. Kids also have more difficulty than adults estimating the speed of an approaching vehicle.

York police have issued 62,399 speeding tickets this year and have placed a significant emphasis on pedestrian enforcement and safety, the chief said.

Of the 22 fatal vehicle crashes so far this

year, which have resulted in 23 deaths, speed was a contributing factor in four collisions, he added.

"If photo radar could have prevented that from happening, then it is well worth the controversy that would undoubtedly happen when, or if, it was re-introduced here in Ontario," Chief La Barge said.

The proposal does not impress Progressive Conservative Newmarket-Aurora MPP and transportation critic Frank Klees. Mr. Caplan's proposal is little more than a tax grab, Mr. Klees said.

"My prediction is it will do very little, if anything, to slow people down," he said.

'At what point does it stop being a safety measure and begin being an income stream for the province?'

He suggests posting more officers at speeding hotspots. The officers don't need to be stationed in those areas all day, but rather at specific times, he said.

Outgoing Richmond Hill public school board trustee Peter Adams-Luchowski also argued for more police presence to crack down on speeders in school zones.

People will "smarten up" and learn where the cameras are in an effort to defeat them, Mr. Adams-Luchowski said.

"At what point does it stop being a safety measure and begin being an income stream for the province?" he asked. "Put the money into live officers."

Also this week, a provincial association representing road builders said it supports the private member's bill.

An Ontario Road Builders Association survey of 328 Ontarians indicated 67 per cent support for safety cameras near schools, community centres and construction zones.

The province has the technology to make the roads safer, so it should be used, association spokesperson Karen Renkema said.

Hwy. 48 cinema complex still in cards, company says

It's still coming, but you'll have to wait a little longer for the much-anticipated opening of Empire Theatre at Major Mackenzie Drive and Markham Road.

It was two years ago that Markham council approved the site plan application for a new, 10-screen movie theatre and retail plaza from Mississauga's ECL Properties Limited.

However, no "reel" progress has been made since.

The screens would be the closest for Stouffville residents.

In an e-mail to the York Region Media Group, Dean Leland, a spokesperson for Empire Theatres, said they continue to

work through the approval process with the town and with the developer.

No firm date has been set for opening, he said.

— L.H. Tiffany Hsieh

Santa parading down Main St.

Santa comes to Stouffville two weeks from today.

The Stouffville Kinsmen's annual Santa Claus Parade is set for Dec. 4 and this year's theme is "Christmas on the Farm."

The parade starts at 2 p.m. on Tenth Line at Aintree Drive, heads south to Main Street then west through downtown, ending at Teva Canada.

To enter, call 416-845-0579 or 905-640-3713.

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