

Officials say Baltimore County makes little on speed camera tickets

Data shows vendor gets bulk of revenue; figures also show reduction in citations over time

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Baltimore County Speed Camera Citations

Data from activation date through November 2010

School Zone	Date Activated	Citations Issued
Woodlawn High School	July 30	6,136
Woodmoor Elementary School	July 22	1,159
Millford Mill Academy	July 23	4,896
Wellwood International School	July 25	1,800
Old Court Middle School	July 29	5,456
Rodgers Forge ES & Dumbarton MS	July 29	1,003
Padonia Elementary School	July 30	6,230
Dulaney High School	July 21	769
Parkville High School	July 28	5,184
Dundalk Middle, Elementary Schools	May 3	1,181
Sparrows Point High School	July 28	462
Lansdowne High School	July 21	316
Arbutus Middle School	May 3	3,957
Halstead Academy	July 23	3,749
Hawthorne Elementary School	July 28	707
TOTAL		43,005

Source: Baltimore County Government

(Enlarge)

Corporation — \$11,995 per camera site, per month in operational costs. For the county's 15 cameras, that amounts to \$179,925 per month.

According to data released Wednesday, as of Nov. 30, 2010, the county took in \$1.16 million in revenue — but remitted \$949,582 in payments to ACS.

That means the county only took in about 19 percent of the citation revenue. On a \$40 citation, that equates to less than \$8 per ticket, while ACS takes in the remaining \$32 per ticket.

"It just shows you that we (Baltimore County) are not doing this for the money. It's for the safety of our children," said County Council Chairman John Olszewski, who represents the 7th District in Dundalk and Middle River.

This week, 1st District Councilman Tom Quirk, of Catonsville and Arbutus, introduced a county bill that would lift the 15-speed-camera cap in the county.

Quirk said the revenue numbers show that, "It's quite clear that speed cameras are not a revenue generating scheme for the county. It's all about safety."

As reported previously in the *Towson Times*, Baltimore County Police Chief Jim Johnson testified before the council during his interview for reappointment by County Executive Kevin Kamenetz, citing evidence of the speed cameras program's success and noting that there had been a 50 percent reduction in speed camera citations since the programs inception only a few months earlier.

Baltimore County government officials on Wednesday released the county speed camera programs revenue figures from the program's inception last year through November.

The figures show that the county made little profit on the program, despite collecting an estimated \$1.16 million in citations from cameras placed in county school zones.

One of the criticisms of the county speed camera program from residents is that the program is a "cash cow for the county" in terms of its revenue generation, according to 5th District Councilman David Marks, who represents Towson and Perry Hall.

But according to county officials, the county pays the contractor — ACS State and Local Solutions, a division of the Xerox

But statistics released on Jan. 5 by the county show less than a 40 percent reduction.

In August 2010 — the first full month that all 15 cameras were operational — 14,068 citations were issued. In November 2010, the most recent data the county provided, 8,465 citations were issued, a reduction of just under 40 percent.

Lt. Robert McCullough, spokesperson for Baltimore County Police Department, said that the chief's "50 percent" testimony relied on information he had been previously provided, and said "we will have additional comments upon review of the data," he said.

Councilman Marks said he had no real problem with the chief's statement.

"I think Chief Johnson is an honorable man. ... I think he may have been referring to one specific camera," Marks said.

Third District Councilman Todd Huff also didn't have a problem with the chief's comments — but does think it's too soon for the county to make changes in the speed camera program as proposed by Quirk.

"In all fairness to him (Chief Johnson), he really has no way of knowing the true statistics because it's too young of a program," Huff said. "I think it's crazy that (Quirk's bill) is being readdressed now when we don't even have a year of data to compare it to."

Marks agreed that the council needs more information.

"I think there is so much information out there, and so many questions. ... The police department needs to brief the council on the many aspects of this program, including the number of violations, bidding process, and how they believe this improves safety," Marks said.

Marks said Quirk's bill has already prompted proposed amendments, including a provision that would identify online the specific intersections where speed cameras are located. Currently, only the general schools zones are identified.

Marks also mentioned the possibility of an amendment altering where in citation revenue is spent by the county. Currently, none of the speed camera revenue goes to the county's general fund.

This "was a surprise to the council staff," Marks said.

Ellen Kobler, spokeswoman for County Executive Kevin Kamenetz, said that after vendor and operational costs, speed camera revenue goes to a restricted fund that can be used for technology and equipment enhancements for public safety agencies such as police, fire, corrections and 911 operations; or other public safety-related capital projects, staffing or matching grants.

As far as the citations themselves, they are issued within 14 days of the violation. Motorists have 40 days to request a court date and 45 days to pay the fine, or appeal.



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