

State highway chief offers compromise to senate bill on speed cameras

Brochin had criticized speed limit reduction, use of cameras when no construction is occurring

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The State Highway Administration is proposing a series of actions in its highway work zone speed camera program — all in response to a bill by a local legislator that would prohibit work zone cameras from issuing citations when construction is not under way.

Th actions include reevaluating whether speeds should be reduced in work zones, closely monitoring camera data, creation of a marketing campaign for public awareness, and more coordination of camera deployment and work construction schedules.

On Tuesday, a hearing was held in Annapolis on the bill sponsored by Sen. Jim Brochin, who represents the 42nd District in Towson. Brochin has been critical of the fact that the cameras operate even when no construction is occurring, and that speeds are reduced through the work zones.

"Clearly, when lanes are wide open, and there is nothing going on and you lower the speed limit by 5 mph, that's gotcha government," Brochin said during the hearing.

At the hearing, State Highway Administrator Neil Pedersen said enforcing speeds through work zones is important as a means of stressing safety in the zones — but he pledged to look at the issue and offer a compromise to the bill.

On Thursday, the Towson Times received a copy of a Feb. 2 letter addressed to Brochin from Pedersen proposing several compromise actions.

"I have discussed the issues that you raised with SHA's traffic engineers and staff responsible for the speed camera program, and we believe that we can address your principal concerns through a series of administrative actions," Pedersen wrote.

"SHA is prepared to implement the ... actions for the statewide speed camera programs, and specifically for the I-695/Charles Street interchange project (in Towson)."

The actions proposed by Pedersen include:

- SHA engineers will reevaluate speed camera sites to determine if speed limits can be raised in venues where they were previously lowered. Currently, at Charles Street and at another site at Liberty Road, the posted speed has been reduced from 55 to 50 in the work zone — the cameras are enforcing.
- SHA will ensure that speed cameras are only in use in work zones where certain criteria is met — such as areas where lanes are splits, where lanes shift, or where shoulders are closed.
- SHA will evaluate work zones to make sure speed camera use is warranted, and will ensure that no speed camera use will occur after construction activities cease that warrant safety concerns.
- SHA will review speed camera deployment schedules to ensure enforcement is only occurring at locations and times when safety is at issue.
- When SHA schedules deployments of cameras, the agency would consider whether workers are scheduled to be present.

- And the SHA will implement a marketing program to inform the public about speed camera use in work zones in the interest of worker and motorist safety.

Marc Lazerow, a legislative aide to Brochin, said Thursday that the senator is reviewing the compromise proposal.

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