

# The Payson Roundup

## Local news

### Photo enforcement plan will flash Highway 260 drivers in February

By Peter Aleshire, Roundup staff reporter

Friday, January 25, 2008

**Next month, Highway 260 speeders** in Star Valley will find themselves sensed, photoed, queried, ticketed and summoned -- and then likely dinged for at least \$185.

It's all part of Star Valley's get-tough response to resident complaints about the speed at which an average of 10,000 cars per day zip through town -- mostly out-of-towners heading for the high country.

Star Valley pushed for the photo enforcement zone on the state highway after the Arizona Department of Transportation refused to drop the speed limit to 35 miles an hour through town, said Town Manager Vito Tedeschi.

"We had a lot of citizen complaints about speed -- lots of accidents and near misses. The town requested a reduction in the speed limit, so this was kind of a last resort," said Tedeschi.

Projections suggest the new system that combines sensors in the pavement with photos showing the driver's face and license plate will generate about 2,000 speeding tickets per year. And that should both reduce accidents and significantly slow traffic passing through town, said Richard Baranzini, the town's consultant on the project.

Outside of the Phoenix metro area, only Star Valley and Prescott Valley have successfully pushed for photo enforcement as a tactic to slow down highway traffic, said Baranzini. The cameras won't monitor an intersection, but general speed.

"It's a very proactive move, for a brand-new community to look to technology to help them with a traffic safety problem," said Baranzini. Many communities living with heavy traffic on highways in the heart of town will be watching the results in Star Valley closely, he said.

"There's a real story here -- photo enforcement is for small communities too," said Baranzini, a police officer for 35 years who played a leading role in setting up Scottsdale's photo enforcement system.

Star Valley had to provide accident and traffic data to convince ADOT to approve the system. One 3.5 hour study recorded between 10 and 20 people an hour exceeding the 11 mile per hour cushion -- which means they were going at least 56 miles an hour in the stretch posted at 45 mph. That means if the sensors and cameras had been hooked up, they would have generated up to 6 tickets per hour. However, studies show that setting up the cameras and sending out the tickets results in a quick drop in average speeds.



**Andy Towle/Roundup**

Star Valley's photo radar operation is getting close to starting up. Officials estimate that it will be operational in February.

As a result, the town estimates the system will generate just 2,000 tickets annually, on a stretch highway that carries 10,000 cars every day.

Even so, the \$400,000 in fines sounds like a windfall -- except Star Valley figures the photo enforcement will be a break-even proposition for the town.

The state gets two-thirds of the fine. In addition, the town has contracted with Redflex to administer the system, which also paid all the installation costs. That private company gets \$35 for each ticket.

Now town officials hope the system will slow hurtling out-of-towners without snaring too many locals.

Fortunately, an alert driver can easily avoid a ticket by watching the signs.

The system relies on a redundant system that detects passing cars by both weight and magnetic field. The computerized system records when each axle goes over sensors buried in the pavement, then automatically calculates the speed.

The street sensors and photos showing both the license plate and driver's face feed into a computer, which stores the data at the same time it transmits it to a state and national computer network that pulls up registration information on the vehicle.

That combination of photo, speed measurements and registration information then goes to Redflex, where someone checks to make sure the photos show the face and license clearly. Redflex then sends potential tickets to a newly hired ticket enforcement person at the Town. This double check process eliminates about 10 percent of the tickets for various reasons, said Tedeschi.

"You can generally see both the plate a recognizable face of the driver, unless you were wearing a Hillary Clinton mask or something," said Tedeschi.

Drivers will then receive a ticket in the mail.

When the first highway based automatic photo enforcement system was introduced in Scottsdale, drivers found they could simply ignore the ticket. Some judges ruled that since the driver hadn't signed a ticket issued by an officer, the court couldn't be certain they'd received the summons and therefore couldn't enforce the ticket.

However, cities have since solved that problem by adding to the system doorbell ringing summons servers. So now if a driver ignores the ticket in the mail, someone will come to the door with a summons -- with the \$32 cost added to the fine.

Fortunately, drivers should have ample opportunity to slow down and avoid that expensive process.

Both ends of town already have 45 mph speed limit signs. The law requires the sensors to be no closer than two tenths of a mile from the first sign showing a reduced speed limit. Shortly after passing that sign, drivers will encounter the first of two, bright-yellow, diamond-shaped photo enforcement signs. The first sensors are buried in the pavement about 300 feet past the second sign.

So drivers have to ignore the 45 mph sign and two photo enforcement signs before they can trigger the

speed sensors. Moreover, the computer will probably not issue a ticket for a car that's putting on the brakes as it passes over the sensor array.

The experience in Scottsdale and Prescott Valley suggest that putting in such systems results in a huge initial rise in citations, which then drop sharply when drivers get used to the idea that they can't slip past the sensors.

In the meantime, town officials say their ability to respond to citizen complaints by pushing through the photo enforcement system is an example of the whole reason the town incorporated two years ago.

"Any time you incorporate," said Tedeschi, "you have a better opportunity to have something done that is unique to your area, as opposed to having to live with state and county standards."

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