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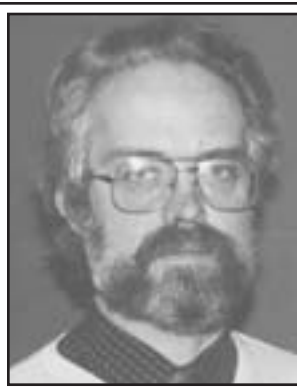
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**Bill's  
Bulletin  
Board**

By Bill Rea

I've been contacting numerous people, mostly provincial politicians, over the last couple of days, collecting opinions on whether photo radar should be reinstated.

Not surprisingly, I have been encountering a wide variety of opinions, running the range from deeply emotional to deeply philosophical. I guess that's the mark of a controversial issue.

For me, there has never been any controversy. Photo radar, when it was in effect for a time in the mid-1990s, did exactly what it was meant to do. It looked out for people who were excessively speeding, took pictures of the cars in question and resulted in notices and appropriate fines being sent to the registered owners of those cars. People who didn't want to pay such fines slowed down. Those who didn't take the warnings seriously contributed more to the provincial coffers, which didn't upset me in the slightest.

The fact is speeding, in addition to being potentially dangerous, is against the law. There are signs at the sides of most roads starkly and clearly stating what the "maximum" speed is on that road. If you chose to drive faster than that "maximum" speed, then you are in violation of the law and subject to penalty.

But the other end of that line is most of us who drive also speeds now and then.

Yes, I have been caught violating the law. And since

I believe laws are there for a reason, I have no problem owning up to what I have done and paying the consequences.

But there's another factor to that reality. Since most drivers are usually guilty of driving a couple of clicks over the limit, there is a reasonable expectation that police are going to show a certain amount of tolerance.

My first access to information on photo radar came late in 1993, when I was covering a coroner's inquest into a horrific head-on crash the previous Mother's Day which claimed the lives of eight kids. There were a number of factors contributing to this tragedy, and speed was one of them.

"What a great idea!" I remember thinking as an expert witness testified about photo radar. I have yet to change my mind.

One of the frequent arguments against photo radar is that it's a money grab on the part of the government. Addressing that in simple terms, that's okay with me. If some speed demon flouting the law elects to contribute a couple of hundred dollars more to the provincial coffers, that's money the government is not going to need from me. Cool!

Okay, I know that's an excessively simplistic model of provincial economics. But getting killed in a head-on with a speeder is pretty simplistic too. If I

must be accused of being a simpleton, I'll take the first scenario, if it's okay with you.

Besides, if it's a money grab, at least it's voluntary. The people who paid fines when photo radar was in effect did so because they chose to. I elected not to pay such fines, and took steps to make sure I didn't have to. I drove along 400-series highways just about every day photo radar was in effect. And no, I didn't impede traffic. I drove at appropriate speeds, keeping up with the flows and I pretty much stayed out of the fast lanes. It was easy, and economical.

Another argument is the offender gets the ticket in the mail sometime after the offence has been committed, thus the initial impact is lost. I would submit that if you compile enough tickets with enough fines, an initial impact is not necessary. You're going to start keeping track of your speed just in case a camera is pointed at you. And the last time I heard, there was an expectation on drivers to keep track of their speed any way, photo radar or no.

There are also those who charge photo radar penalizes the car owner and not the driver. That cuts no ice with me. For one thing, most people own the cars they drive, or at least they are registered in their names. And if someone else is driving, the owner would know who it is (if not, we're dealing with one bloody irresponsible car owner).

How many people do you let drive your car? It wouldn't take many fingers to count the number of people I would lend my wheels to. I suspect such is the case for most of you. If I were to get a notice in the mail that my car was photographed doing so many clicks over the limit on a

certain day in a particular location, I would be fairly simple to determine whether it was me or someone else. If, for example, I determined it was a friend who had the car at that time, a phone call would likely ensue.

"Oh dear friend," I would open, "I have before me documentation that you were verily driving my motor vehicle at a speed which our local authorities deemed excessive."

"Hark," he (or she) would promptly respond. "How deeply have I sinned against thee and them, and do I here now pledge appropriate reimbursement will pass from my purse to yours with due dispatch."

That's not an exact transcript of our conversation, you understand. I don't usually engage in Shakespeare-type talk to that extent. But that would be the substance of such a discussion, if my friend has hopes of ever using my wheels again.

There have been other people who have charged that photo radar does nothing to combat other sins on the road, like tail-gating, unsafe lane changes, etc. True, and it's also true that photo radar is not meant to address these issues.

A bandage is not going to cure a person suffering a heart attack, and enema is not likely to cure a toothache and aspirin will do little to help set a broken bone. Yet I have never heard any talk of doing away with bandages, aspirin or enemas. They are tools used in the broader practice of medicine. Why can't photo radar be used as a tool in the broader practice of increasing traffic safety? I have never heard anyone suggest it become a substitute for more and better police enforcement. Indeed, I have very little use for such an idea.

I have also heard complaints that the pictures taken in photo radar represent an invasion of privacy. The last time I checked, the highways are public, and so is their use.

The fact is the real argument against photo radar is simple. There are people in our society who like to drive well in excess of the posted speed limit, and photo radar makes it harder for them to get away with it. Mike Harris saw that in 1995, and pledged he would do away with it if elected. The man saw a whole bunch of ripe votes there for the plucking. So he got elected, and he did away with photo radar.

I will grant there is one valid argument that could be made against photo radar. What if it screws up, and assesses fines that should not be assessed? It's kind of hard to argue with a camera in court. And sometimes, there might be justification for speeding, which can be explained to a police officer, but not to a camera. For that reason, I would never support any notion of insurance companies being informed of photo radar convictions, nor would I go along with demerit points being assessed. Unless there is an effective appeal mechanism, then that would be going too far.

I guess that last paragraph proves that photo radar is not perfect, but neither is anything else that we live with and make regular use of in our daily lives.

If somebody has something better to suggest, something that will guarantee that neither you or I will ever be killed in an automobile accident, then let's hear it.

And if there is a really good and valid argument against photo radar, then let's hear that too. I've been waiting patiently for more than 10 years. I still am.

**Editorial**

**Canada must continue in Afghanistan**

It's hard to ask fellow Canadians to put themselves in harm's way, especially in light of last week's tragic events which saw six more of our service personnel fall victim in Afghanistan.

But as members of the world community, that is what we must do.

As York — Simcoe MP Peter Van Loan pointed out last week, Canada is one of 37 countries taking part in this United Nations sanctioned mission to try to bring stability to an area that has been dominated for so long by terrorist groups.

Canada has to do its bit. It's very easy for some to

say it's not our problem. But such arguments fall flat on a number of levels.

For one thing, the whole U.N. contingent could leave, and the government and people of Afghanistan can be left to the tender mercies of those who plant bombs along roads, or who sanction the hijacking of aircraft so they can be flown into office buildings during the middle of work days.

But Canadians are not in the habit of turning their backs on international obligations. In fact, Canadian military personnel have developed a reputation of taking on the tough assign-

ments and bringing them to successful conclusions.

Which country's soldiers took Vimy Ridge?

And let us not forget our obligations on the war on terror. While the dreadful attacks of Sept. 11, 2001 were launched against the United States, Canadian lives were lost that day as well. And Canada is not immune from terrorist attacks. Indeed, some sources have clearly indicated we're a target.

And terrorists are very much active these days, as they surely were for 9-11. In Britain in the last couple of weeks, officials averted ter-

rorist attacks that could have had appalling consequences.

The loss of one Canadian military representative in Afghanistan is tragic, as is the loss of six, and talk of our international obligations are admittedly small comfort to the family and friends of the fallen.

But it is also reality that these people know there are risks involved, and they accept them.

It was heartening to hear that federal Liberals, through the voice of Oak Ridges — Markham MP Lui Temelkovski, are prepared to see the mission continue, at least until February 2009.

After that, we anticipate there will be a lively discussion between the political parties in Ottawa and the views of all their constituents on whether things should continue.

It's far too early to speculate on where such discussions will go. Please God, there will be no more Canadians fatalities to be subject of such debate. But if there are, let us make sure that we consider our international obligations to the men, women and children with whom we share this planet. And the consequences of meekly letting the terrorists call the shots.