

Traffic lights will soon have cameras

Dana Beyerle – Montgomery Bureau Chief



A street sign informs motorists that there are traffic-light cameras in use. Tuscaloosa could have similar cameras to help enforce traffic safety laws in 2012.

MONTGOMERY | A bill allowing Tuscaloosa officials to install automatic cameras at intersections to photograph the license plates of red-light violators has won final approval.

The House and Senate on Thursday gave final passage to the amended version of the bill sponsored by Rep. Chris England, D-Tuscaloosa.

The House and Senate approved Gov. Bob Riley's executive amendment to the bill known as the Tuscaloosa Red Light Safety Act, which now becomes law.

Mayor Walt Maddox said if the red-light cameras are incorporated in the city's new operating budget, the cameras could be installed next year. He said the timing of the bill's is "fortuitous" as the city will soon begin discussing the 2011 fiscal year operating budget.

"(The city transportation department) and the Office of the City Engineer will prepare a recommendation to my office that will include the type (of) technology system to be implemented, proposed locations and potential costs," Maddox said in an e-mail. "It is my goal to include traffic-light cameras in my budget submittal to the City Council this August."

Maddox said that assuming the council approves the fiscal year 2011 budget in September, "we are probably looking at implementation in spring and/or summer 2012."

The council by ordinance may adopt rules for installing and operating cameras at intersections controlled by traffic lights.

England's red-light camera bill is the second major piece of local legislation passed for the city of Tuscaloosa in the 2010 session. The first was a bill allowing a referendum on [Sunday alcohol sales](#).

“We can now identify those intersections that are dangerous because of red-light running that endangers lives,” England said. “We can save lives.”

The bill says that automated traffic cameras are effective in reducing the number of red light violations and the number of traffic accidents, deaths and injuries.

The cameras will be automated and capable of photographing the rear of vehicles that run red lights, capturing the license plate image for review by a sworn police officer.

The photographic evidence will be sufficient to issue a civil fine to the registered owner of the vehicle just as if a sworn police officer had witnessed a traffic light violation in person. The city may send a warning notice instead.

Running a red light will be a non-criminal civil violation that can be contested. The fine may not exceed \$100 but an additional fee of \$10 per violation will be collected for the Alabama Criminal Justice Information Center to cover record-keeping costs. Riley amended the original bill that passed earlier this month to protect the ACJIC funding.

Tuscaloosa will be required to post signs informing drivers of red-light camera use at a minimum of five roadway entry points to the city. The signs shall decree “automated cameras used in red light enforcement.”

The city also will be required to post warning signs at intersections containing automated cameras and to conduct a public relations campaign for at least 30 days to inform motorists of the devices' pending use.