

Bill Rea ? Photo radar can benefit

There were a couple of stories over the last week or so that caught my eye, and they were related, inasmuch as they involve the motoring public.

It was reported that the government in British Columbia is planning to crack down on drivers who hog the passing lane, and give police more power to hand out tickets.

This is a topic that strikes home to me, since "improper choice of lanes" was one of the items cited some 40 years ago when the examiner told me I had flunked my driver's test. I've had worse days.

The rule is, as I learned the hard way that day, is you're supposed to keep right except to pass.

Now that's all well in normal circumstances, although there are certain realities that come into play. For example, if one is planning to turn left in the near future, one had better get into the left lane. And when driving in an urban area, one is frequently obliged to move into the passing lane when the moving is good.

A rule like this would be a little hard to enforce, I would think, in urban areas. But things are probably different on 400-series highways in Ontario.

I drive to Muskoka maybe a dozen times per year, meaning a lot of driving on the Highway 400 extension, which starts just north of Barrie (I've never driven far enough to learn how far north it goes). The extension is two lanes each way, as far as I have explored, and I have never run into trouble with slow-moving traffic holding things up. It is also a fact that I have seldom run into heavy traffic on that road, and have never seen problems with people hogging the passing lane.

And what would be the speed factors when hogging comes into effect?

The speed limit (construction zones notwithstanding) on the extension is 100 km-h. True, very few people drive at that speed at optimum conditions. There have been times I've set the cruise control at 110, and watched traffic fly by me. So 120 often seem the appropriate speed, although that's exceeding the maximum limit by 20. And at what point do the cops start taking action?

Technically, if you're doing 101, you're in violation of the law,

Although there seems to be little push in Ontario to put forth the measures that authorities in B.C. are proposing, I think I could go along with it, but there would have to be some changes in the way things are done.

For one thing, the speed limit would have to be raised to 120 km-h. It shouldn't be that great an adjustment, since experience tells me that's the speed most people drive anyway.

The other part is to bring back photo radar, one of the very few good things the Bob Rae government did for Ontario. That would have to come with a couple of provisos. The main one being that the legislation reinstating photo radar would have to clearly stipulate at what point it could be utilized. Issuing tickets at 20 km-h over that new posted limit would make sense, but that could certainly be open to discussion.

The point is anyone who knows me knows very well that I am a very strong advocate of photo radar.

And that brings us to the other story.

There's a movement in York Region to get photo radar restored. And from what I have been told, both the Liberals and Progressive Conservatives at Queen's Park are not prepared to allow it. Does that mean I have to vote NDP in the next provincial election?

Let us get a few basic facts straight. Photo radar was in effect for a while in the mid-1990s, and it drew a lot of anger.

There were some who argued that while it might be effective when it came to curbing speeding, it did nothing to prevent other sins of the road like tailgating.

Well excuse me, but photo radar wasn't designed to address tailgaters, distracted drivers, illegal parkers or those who drive cars that are ugly. Aspirin will not cure cancer, but I've heard of no movement to ban aspirin on account of that. Photo radar was designed and implemented to address speeders, so let it.

There were also those who charged that photo radar was a cash grab. Indeed it was, and it was my kind of cash grab. That is because the contributions to the Provincial coffers from the program were voluntary.

You see, during the mid to late 1990s, I worked in the east end of Toronto. That meant I had to drive 400-series highways every day photo radar was in effect. Since I elected not to speed excessively, I never paid a dime to that particular cause. I didn't obey the speed limit religiously (who does?), but I didn't impede traffic either. I drove at appropriate speeds and kept my money in my bank account. I happily let the speed demons add to the Provincial government's income, in the hope (probably naïve, considering it was an NDP government) that it might reduce my tax burden.

The government takes tax dollars for certain things our kindergarten teachers told us not to do. I used to smoke, so I paid lots of extra money on taxes for the tobacco I burned. I take a drink, therefore I pay a certain amount of extra tax every time I visit LCBO.

Both activities are considered sins, although they represent perfectly legal activities, at least for those who have reached a certain age. At what age does the law permit you or me to speed?

Another argument against photo radar, and one that really annoys me, is the one that people take things more seriously when a cop pulls them over than they do if they get a ticket in the mail some weeks later. That part is true. Having been pulled over a couple of times over the years for speeding, I can tell you the feeling you get in the pit of your stomach when you realize the cop means you is very far from pleasant. But don't police officers have other things to do?

I attend a lot of meetings of ratepayer groups, as well as public meetings regarding subdivisions and the like. People constantly complain about the speeds at which motorists drive through developed areas like school zones, etc. But there are also complaints about vandalism, theft, trespassing, break-ins, etc. It is a fact that a police officer trying to nab speeders is not likely to be doing much to prevent other crimes, and police often say (with very little argument from politicians) that they don't have the resources to be everywhere and do everything. One would think anything that helps deal with speeders and leave police free to do other things would be a big benefit.

So, who's arguing against that?

