

Oregon Department of Transportation

2020 Report on Photo Radar in Highway Work Zones

BACKGROUND

ORS 810.441 allows the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) to ask the Oregon State Police or other law enforcement jurisdictions authorized under ORS 810.438, to operate photo radar in state highway work zones.

Criteria surrounding the use of photo radar is identified in ORS 810.441. These criteria include the requirement to deploy photo radar within 100 yards of workers or within 100 yards of a highway configuration change. Signs announcing the use of photo radar must also be posted. The actual speed of the vehicle must be displayed within 150 feet of the photo radar unit. A uniformed police officer in a marked vehicle must be present in order for a traffic citation to be issued.

Photo radar is an enhanced method of enforcing the speed law and is used nationally and by authorized Oregon jurisdictions to control speeding behavior. Photo radar is operated from a marked police van with a trained officer at the controls. Motorists see a sign in advance of the operation and a reader board displaying the speed of each vehicle.

When a speeding vehicle is detected, the device takes two photos: one as the car approaches, and a second as it drives away to record the license plate. The registered owner of the vehicle then gets a ticket in the mail.

ORS 810.441 requires ODOT to deliver a Process and Outcome Evaluation to the Legislative Assembly by March 1 of each odd-numbered year. This report contains the following:

1. The effect of the use of photo radar on traffic safety,
2. The degree of public acceptance of the use of photo radar, and
3. The process of administration of the use of photo radar.

PHOTO RADAR PROCESS AND OUTCOME EVALUATION

The effect of the use of photo radar on traffic safety:

ODOT continues to work with cities authorized to provide photo radar enforcement to use work zone photo radar on state construction projects within their city limits.

In 2018 ODOT asked the City of Medford Police Department to provide work zone photo radar on the "I-5: Medford Viaduct & Barnett Road Overpass Project". After agreement, ODOT worked with the Medford Police Department and the City of Medford Municipal Court to deploy photo radar on this Interstate 5 project.

ODOT and the City of Medford Police Department coordinated to ensure that worker presence, advance signing, temporary traffic control and photo radar equipment criteria were in accordance with ORS requirements.

Medford Police Department deployed the work zone photo radar van a total of 15 days on the project. Each deployment lasted for 4 hours.

The number of violations captured and the number of citations issued were tracked. For this project a total of 1,058 work zone photo radar violations were captured. These violations were processed and some were rejected due to: driver obstruction; license plate obstruction; driver gender didn't match registered owner; poor photograph; or other miscellaneous conditions that made the violations unsuitable to move to citation status.

Out of the 1,058 violations captured a total of 686 speeding citations were issued. This means that an average of 11.5 citations were issued per hour for the time the Medford Police Department was deployed in the work zone and engaging in photo radar activities. The legal speed through the work zone was 40 MPH. Speeds recorded for the violations captured averaged 56 MPH with a high speed of 91 MPH.

It was noted by ODOT observers and the contractor that when work zone photo radar equipment was in place traffic speeds were slower, for both directions of travel, than when this equipment was absent. Medford Police recommended that a formal speed survey be completed to document the differences in speeds with and without work zone photo radar equipment present. Stage 2 of the "I-5: Medford Viaduct & Barnett Road Overpass Project" is currently under development. It is anticipated that this project will utilize work zone photo radar and that a formal speed comparison study will be performed.

In 2020, no projects employed the use of Photo Radar.

The degree of public acceptance of the use of photo radar:

ODOT annually contracts with either a private research firm or Portland State University to obtain and document Oregonian's public perceptions on various transportation safety-related issues. This is done in order to track and respond to transportation safety concerns identified by Oregonians.

From a September 2017 ODOT Transportation Safety Division Statewide Public Opinion Survey, 64.4% of Oregonians polled supported the use of photo radar for work zone traffic enforcement. Historically, Oregonian's support for use of work zone photo radar enforcement is in the mid-60 percentile range.

Also worthy of note is that since the year 2015, Oregon motorists who had work zone safety concerns identified excessive vehicle speed as their top work zone concern. In the 2020 survey, 57% had seen or experienced speeding in the work zone.

The process of administration of the use of photo radar:

ODOT, the Medford Police Department and the project contractor worked closely to ensure work zone photo radar was implemented successfully and conformed to ORS requirements. The City of Medford Municipal Court was also contacted in advance of the project to discuss application of the law and to ensure that the work zone photo radar process was conducted to the Court's expectations.

ODOT, Medford Police Department and the project contractor met before the project began and coordinated issues throughout the project so that work zone photo radar was utilized appropriately to meet project goals of reduced speeding and a safer work zone. Coordination went smoothly and all parties were willing to make needed adjustments to optimize work zone photo radar enforcement efficiency and effectiveness.