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Red Light Cameras Are Not the Cure for What Ails Milwaukee

A Long-Term Solution to Reckless Driving Will Require Leadership

**Statement from Alderman Bob Donovan
February 25, 2020**

I suppose there is some comfort in knowing that Mayor Tom Barrett has been stirred to action on the problem of reckless driving. Likely responding to the Wisconsin Policy Forum's recent report of the disproportionate effect reckless driving has had on people of color, the Mayor was quoted in the press yesterday at last expressing his support for so-called "red light cameras".

I would first observe that the City has been asking the State of Wisconsin for permission to install these cameras for years. It makes me wonder where the Mayor's been all this time.

As to their merits, I would call myself a reluctant convert to the case for red light camera. Should it come to me while still in office, I will review any proposal for their implementation with a healthy dose of skepticism. I think those who argue they are prone to error, can disproportionately affect the poor, and can turn innocent driving mistakes into expensive violations have a point. And with the worst violators, the dangerous repeat offenders, do we really imagine that they will have any more respect for a citation than they do for a red light?

Given the severity of the problem, though, I am and have been willing at least to listen. I have no use, however, for the idea that we can substitute red light cameras for real reforms – reforms that many, including the Mayor, have seemed to ignore or resist. Until district attorneys and judges start treating reckless driving in all forms as a serious offense – potentially even resulting in imprisonment – there will be no real change. Until there are enough police officers assigned to patrol our streets and enforce our laws there will, similarly, be no real change.

I invite all of you to read the report of the Carjacking and Reckless Driving Task Force ably chaired by my colleague, Ald. Michael Murphy. It is a difficult read. It tells a story of a community that seems to know where the problems really are but too often lacks the political will to do the heavy lifting, favoring instead shiny objects like red light cameras which, if nothing else, seem easy.

It took a long time to create the dangerous environment in which we find ourselves. It will take time and effort to find our way out. Anyone who tells you differently is selling something.

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