Students weigh in on school zone traffic cameras

Melissa Watson
melissa.watson@thevermilion.com

Lafayette drivers will soon have to keep a closer eye on their speedometers due to a resolution passed by the Lafayette City-Parish Council to install traffic cameras in school zones. The resolution passed with a 6-2 vote on Feb. 20.

Lafayette Mayor-President Joel Robideaux proposed the resolution, arguing the cameras would improve the safety of students, as the enforcement of school zone speed limits would be improved.

The cameras are also seen as a way of generating revenue.

“It’s going to generate money. Is something wrong with that?” Councilman Kenneth Boudreaux, District 4, said at the meeting.

Regarding traffic cameras on the University of Louisiana at Lafayette campus, Councilman Jared Bellard, District 5, said installation is possible.

“I don’t see why (the council) would not. It’s a city-owned road and if the council votes to do that, I’m sure they could,” Bellard said.

Bellard voted against the cameras for revenue reasons, not the effectiveness of cameras in enforcing speed limits.

“I voted ‘no’ on the resolution simply because, if we’re going to get into the sharing of revenue business, if people are going to pay fines for not following the law, I’d rather the city own the equipment and collect 100 percent of the fine,” Bellard said.

Bellard explained the city had to give 40 percent of the collected revenue to the traffic camera company Redflex in the past.

Bellard said he thinks the fines should all go back into Lafayette because the fines are collected from the Lafayette area.

“When you get a speeding ticket by a police officer, you have to pay court costs and a fine and that money stays in Lafayette Parish,” Bellard said. “They don’t take 40 percent of that ticket and go give it to someone else. If there was no money to be made in this, do you think there would be cameras in school zones? Of course not, no one’s going to do it for free. So it’s not a safety issue… Maybe you can increase safety, but it’s more revenue-driven.”

UL Lafayette Associate Director of Public Safety & Risk Manager Joseph Pons said he isn’t sure whether or not the cameras would improve student safety.

“I don’t think it could hurt,” said Pons.

Pons said while the UL Lafayette Police have some traffic jurisdiction when they use radar guns, the city has control over the placement of the cameras any citations issued as a result.

“Enforcing any notifications or violations (from the cameras) is the city’s responsibility,” said Pons.

This is not the first time Lafayette has tried using cameras to enforce traffic laws. High-traffic intersections, such as the intersection of Johnston Street and South College Road, had traffic cameras in operation until the Lafayette contract with Redflex expired and they were shut off on June 4, 2017, and taken down in August 2017, according to a KLKY report.

“I don’t understand the justification of putting the cameras in (school) zones if they can’t even keep them in the intersections,” said Tranquella Roberson, junior history major. “I don’t know, I feel like they’re just trying to make money.”

Councilman William Theriot, District 9, also argued against the new cameras.

“We have never found a time when a child or student was involved in a vehicle accident or a major highway in front of a school in Lafayette Parish (in the last 30 years),” said Theriot at the meeting.

Robideaux, at the meeting, said the traffic cameras are intended to be in operation only during school hours and events.