

How to Beat the Photo Lights

This may seem a little off-topic from real estate investing but this is a topic which has or will make an impact on everyone driving a car. If it hasn't bothered you, it will and usually by getting a letter from your municipality stating that your auto, for which you are responsible, was involved in running a red light.

It will go on to say that if you aren't the driver it doesn't matter, but the better camera setups have your picture through the front window in addition to the rear camera with your license. The fine can be \$175 or higher and if you go to court, the fine will be much higher. There is no doubt that running a red light is dangerous and at least careless, but sometimes the lights can change very quickly. Actually, it seems un-American that normally law-abiding citizens have to be watched by robots that have a micro-circuit for a brain.

As Nan and I have driven a combined 100+ years in South Florida, I would have thought we had seen it all. But red light runners are the worst and we have been lucky to have had only near misses. We thought the best answer was to delay the start of the green light to 4 – 5 seconds after the red light started for the opposite lanes. This would give the runners the opportunity to get through the intersection before the greens light lanes moved out. This was a simple solution which would have worked but didn't raise money for the cities and the state.

Times have changed, in the good old days our elected officials took pride in representing their constituencies. Now a days, none of them can agree on anything but what's in their individual best interest. The will of the majority has become lost on seemingly deaf politicians and it's often true about local and national officials. Local officials seem bent on raising money they squandered in the past by now making the lives of their municipal residents as uncomfortable as possible. What better way than focusing on getting photo or camera lights at heavily trafficked intersections?

I have to run one gauntlet where there are carefully stationed cameras at three lights in a row. My problem has been that timing the lights to make sure I get through each one without getting snagged in a light turning yellow has made me almost paranoid. I sometimes floor the gas while other times slow to a crawl. I am actually happy to stop for a red light. Nan and I try to forecast when the upcoming light will change and suddenly not give me enough time to get through the intersection. Frankly, it's maddening!

I believe the lights will probably cause more accidents than they will stop from happening. I am not a conspiracy theorist, but these photo lights have almost made me change my mind. Sure, I can take obscure back roads to avoid them. Actually, when I do this Nan is writing down property addresses that are abandoned so there is some value. But it isn't feasible to always avoid these lights.

We stumbled on a simple solution that seemingly worked every time until one light flat out fooled us. The idea is very simple. When you approach one of these photo lights look to the right side, or a few times on the left side, of the intersection, and specifically look for the cross-walk light for pedestrians. The small light on a pole looks like a man in motion (a slow running man) and it is colored white. When white, it signals for the pedestrians on the opposite side to cross in the crosswalk.

As the traffic timer gets further into the cycle, the white "walking guy" turns to a red hand and then "USUALLY" starts a countdown. The countdown starts at anywhere from 25 to 10 seconds. Remember it is counting down, so when it reaches the number "1", the next second it turns to a flashing red hand and, most importantly, the traffic lights for your lanes turn YELLOW. If you are in the intersection as the light goes yellow, you may be in trouble if the timer for the RED light and the camera photo are very short (2 – 3 seconds). Speeding up now is too late because you have just scored a \$175 non-defendable nuisance ticket!

So here is an "almost infallible" remedy for this dilemma – as you approach an intersection, first look for a sign that indicates a photo light about 75 – 100 feet from the intersection itself. It will have a cartoon-like stop light in color and it may or may not say "Photo Light". Once you know which intersections have cameras, this step is no longer important. However, new cameras are regularly being installed so always look for the poles holding the cameras. Some cities have the poles and cameras painted green and nestled in with overhanging trees.

As you approach a photo intersection, start looking for the cross walk light and notice if it is white (running man) or a red hand. If white, go for it and don't be afraid and you won't have to floor it. However, if it turns red as you are watching it, BEWARE; you have to make a critical decision. If you are 3 – 4 car lengths out from the nearest side of the intersection, you should be able to make it but no guarantees.

If the red pedestrian light is in its countdown mode, and you can read the numbers, you'll need about 5 – 6 seconds to make it through the intersection. Less than five seconds remaining is an 80% chance of not making it! You will be rewarded by a \$175 ticket.

Having said all that, Nan and I were having a great time watching our newly devised system to beat the bullies in City Hall as it worked on light after light. The last one we had to cross before getting home was coming up and we could clearly see the pedestrian light on the far side and it was white. We were one car length outside of the intersection when the light

went to a red hand. We were ready to “high five’ one another when our lane light immediately turned to yellow and I was in the beginning of the intersection!

So on seven of eight photo lights we were the Masters of the Universe – laughing at each one as we could seeming read the minds of these mindless robots! The last one must have learned from its other brothers as we were left dumbfounded as we sailed through a yellow or maybe red light. This one last robot may have out-witted us. I guess I’ll have to keep watching the mail to see how that one light works and how figure out how long the yellow light is but likely from the parking lot next to the intersection.

Good luck out there,
Dave Dinkel