Why Amber Time Matters...

The purpose of the yellow interval is to **warn approaching traffic** of the imminent **right-of-way change**.

*Source: Federal Highway Administration (FHWA).*

**If the amber light is too long, drivers will disregard it** and consider it part of the green light cycle.


Excessively **long signal lights can encourage red-light running** because **drivers do not want to have to wait** several minutes for the next green interval.


**Drivers adapt to longer yellow time.**


**Longer yellow light times do not result in lasting change** in driver behavior. “Prior research examining longer term effects of increased yellow timing found that reductions in red-light violations were sustained at least 6 months to 1 year...but that some drivers might adapt to increases in yellow duration and continue to run red lights.”


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**Myth V. Fact**

**Myth** – Cities shorten the timing of yellow lights to increase revenue from fines.

**Fact**: Yellow light time is set to **optimize safety and traffic flow**. Federal guidelines recommend yellow lights last from **3 to 6 seconds**. Local authorities set the duration based on many factors including: traffic volume, speed, roadway grade and intersection design.


**Myth** – To stop red-light running, just make yellow lights longer.

**Fact**: Longer yellow lights **do not prevent red-light running** as effectively as red-light safety cameras. This is proven in a Philadelphia study where researchers found one added second of amber time decreased red-light running violations by 36%, but the installation of **red-light safety cameras reduced violations an additional 96%**.

Myth – People do not run red lights on purpose. The yellow is just too short.

Fact: More than 1 in 3 drivers (37%) admit to running a traffic light that had just turned red when they could have stopped safely in the past 30 days.  

Fact: “The yellow interval does not determine the stopping time of those who choose to stop, because their deceleration and slower average speed as they stop means they have longer than the yellow interval to achieve their stop.”  

Myth – Longer yellow light times will make intersections safer.

Fact: Raising the yellow light time might reduce violations but it doesn’t change driver behavior. In fact, it may cause secondary problems when the driver learns an unsafe behavior that could cause a crash at other signal locations where yellow intervals may not have been extended arbitrarily.

Fact: Red-light safety cameras change dangerous driver behavior and help protect everyone. Traffic studies found red-light running violations fell by 40% to 96% after the introduction of red-light cameras, and the reductions occurred not only at camera-equipped sites but also at signalized intersections without cameras, indicating community-wide changes in driver behavior.  
Source: Insurance Institute for Highway Safety.

Statistics and Studies

Georgia law added 1 second to yellow light times at intersections with red-light cameras in 2009. That year, red-light running fatalities in the state increased 53% from 2008. Red-light running fatalities in 2010 and 2011 were 41% and 88% higher respectively than in 2008.  
Sources: NCSA office of National Highway Traffic Safety Administration; Georgia House Bill 77; “Experience in Georgia with Photo Enforcement.” ITE 2008 Technical Conference, March 31, 2008; Georgia Department of Transportation.

In Texas, at 275 intersections with red-light running cameras and yellow light times that met established guidelines, red-light running crashes decreased 23% one year after red-light cameras were installed, 27% the second year and 21% the third year.  
Note: Study periods compare time frames before and after camera installation.  