

Traffic Enforcement Audit



Objective

Are City enforcement efforts effectively creating a safe mobility environment, and what impact does the level of enforcement have on other city programs and initiatives?

Background

The Austin Police Department (APD) is responsible for enforcement of traffic laws on all roadways within the City limits of Austin.

Municipal Court resolves traffic citations and red light camera violations. Municipal Court collects fines and fees from traffic citations as general fund revenue.

What We Recommend

Municipal Court should work with relevant stakeholders to evaluate current intersection crash data to determine if current red light cameras should be moved or new cameras added.

What We Found

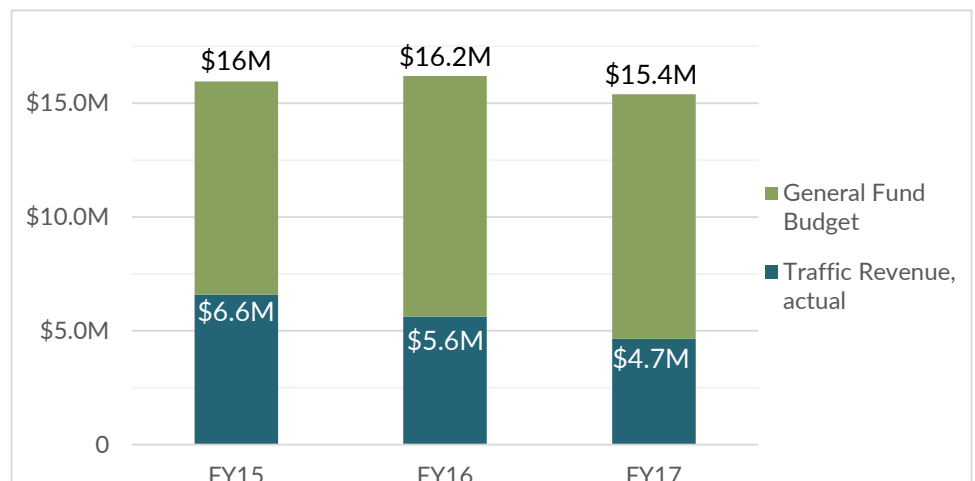
Austin Police Department officers have limited time for traffic enforcement during regular shifts. APD uses grant funding and red light cameras to supplement enforcement.

- During regular shifts, officers must manage competing interests of responding to calls, maintaining traffic flow, and enforcing traffic laws.
- APD uses a grant from the Texas Department of Transportation to pay officers to conduct traffic enforcement.
- Officers paid under this grant issued a large percentage of APD citations in 2017. This includes 54% of speeding citations and 62% of seat belt citations.
- There are ten red light cameras located at intersections throughout the City that appear to have reduced the number of crashes at these intersections from 145 per year before camera installation to an average of less than 50 per year.

Although revenue from citations partially funds Municipal Court, it can be an inconsistent source of funding.

- Staff with both APD and Municipal Court stressed that the purpose of traffic enforcement is to promote safety on City streets, not to generate revenue.
- For example, APD policy advises officers to issue a citation for defective headlights or tail-lights only if there is evidence of willful neglect or the driver has multiple warnings.
- Drivers have several options other than payment to address a citation (i.e. taking a driver safety course).

Municipal Court General Fund Budget and Traffic Revenue, FY2015-FY2017



SOURCE: OCA analysis of Austin Municipal Court revenue from traffic fines, May 2018.