**Hwy 63 drivers could face vehicle seizures, $10,000 fines**

*by* Karen Kleiss, edmontonjournal.com June 29, 2012

EDMONTON - Drivers who speed on Highway 63 could have their vehicles seized and face fines of up to $10,000 if the government implements recommendations in a report released Friday.

Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo MLA Mike Allen tabled 22 recommendations for improving safety on the highway to Fort McMurray, many of them high-tech solutions to the dangerous driving that has caused collisions that killed 125 drivers and passengers since 1990.

The most controversial of those ideas includes re-introducing photo radar on Alberta highways, a recommendation immediately dismissed by government but bound to reignite debate over the idea.

“People have made it clear to me that they are comfortable with moving beyond the traditional physical enforcement methods in order to identify and penalize high-risk drivers who are making Highway 63 a more dangerous place,” Allen wrote in the 31-page report.

“A point-to-point automated traffic enforcement system, which measures the amount of time it takes a vehicle to drive between two points and calculates the average speed, may be a more palatable option than traditional photo radar.

“A speeding driver cannot slow down at one location where photo radar is located, only to speed up when out of range.”

Allen said 63 per cent of Albertans polled during a town hall supported the idea.

Automated enforcement is currently used in some Alberta municipalities, but not on highways, a result of a policy decision made in December 1999 when then-infrastructure minister Ed Stelmach first introduced the province’s photo radar guidelines.

Transportation Minister Ric McIver immediately dismissed the recommendation because it contravenes provincial policy, and said the province has no plans to revisit the idea.

“That policy has been in place a lot longer than I have,” McIver said. “Albertans don’t favour photo radar on highways.”

Allen also suggested the province install anti-speeding devices in vehicles owned by repeat, excessive speeders. The devices would alert the driver and the Alberta Transportation Safety Board when the vehicle hits high speeds.

He called for the installation of driver speed feedback signs, message boards that tell drivers about conditions and delays, and wildlife fencing to keep animals off the road, which have reduced wildlife crashed by up to 80 per cent in the U.S.

Allen said $10,000 fines would further deter high-risk driving, and that “several jurisdictions in Canada have seen a reduction in serious injuries and fatalities since implementing vehicle seizures for excessive speeding.”

A vehicle seizure policy introduced by British Columbia in 2010 resulted in more than 10,000 vehicles being seized and impounded, and the number of fatal and injury crashes caused by speeding drivers was cut in half, to 105.

Allen urged the province to accelerate the twinning of Highway 63, which could reduce collisions by up to 60 per cent, according to a 2004 Transport Canada report.

McIver pledged to complete construction in eight years, down from the original 11. The cost is estimated at $550 million.

Wildrose MLA Shayne Saskiw said there’s nothing new in the report.

“It’s time for action,” Saskiw said. “We’ve seen, since 2006, that this was a priority, and since then there has only been roughly 36 kilometres that have been twinned. It’s a compliment to say it’s (moving) at a snail’s pace.”

NDP MLA Deron Bilous said the report provides little detail on how the government plans to pay for the work and said eight years is too long to wait.

“This is clearly unacceptable for Albertans, it’s unacceptable for the mayor of Fort McMurray, (who) said half that time is more reasonable.”

“If this truly was a priority for this government, the wheels would have been put in motion years ago.”

The highway to Fort McMurray has been under scrutiny for years as traffic to the heart of the oilsands industry increases. But an April 27 crash that killed seven people when two pickup trucks collided 50 kilometres north of Wandering River sparked a wave of community protest and prompted a pledge from Premier Alison Redford to do more to improve the highway’s safety.

Since 1990, 125 people have died on the highway. The province announced plans to twin 243 kilometres of the highway in 2006, but progress has been slow.

Thirty-three kilometres of the 443-kilometre highway have been twinned to date, while another 36 kilometres are under construction and due for completion next year. Existing Alberta Transportation plans would see an additional 99 kilometres of twinning between Fort McMurray and Atmore by 2015.

***With files from Sarah O’Donnell***

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# No photo-radar, toll for Alberta's Highway 63

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Alberta will not use photo radar or tolls to improve safety on Highway 63, says the province's transportation minister.

"It's been a long-standing policy of the government not to do photo radar on provincial highways and I'm not going to be recommending changing that policy," said Ric McIver on Friday.

McIver said he accepts all other [recommendations contained in a report](https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/392843-towards-a-safer63.html) prepared by Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo MLA Mike Allen on preventing collisions on the busy road to Alberta's oilsands, often dubbed the "lifeline" to the province's economic engine and the "highway of death."

While Allen recommended the province do more to speed up twinning the highway, he also suggested the province make more immediate improvements such as building more passing lanes and rest areas; and improving highway maintenance and road markings.

Allen also suggested using photo radar, a dedicated RCMP and sheriff presence on the highway, aerial enforcement of speed limits and higher penalties for violations.

Speeding is such a serious issue on the highway, the province should seize vehicles caught speeding excessively, Allen said.

McIver said he supports all the recommendations in Allen's report other than photo radar.

McIver also said he does not support making the highway a toll road, though the idea was not one of the recommendations in the report.

Twinning remains a priority, he said.

In 2006, the province announced it would twin a 240-kilometre stretch of Highway 63.

To date, 33 kilometres have been done, with the province estimating to complete 50 per cent of the job in the next three years.

"Through our investigations we learned if we were to go pay as you go at $50 million a year, (completing the highway) would take 11 years," McIver said. "We already know we can take at least a third off of that.

"We are committed to working hard to shorten that time span further."

But opposition parties slammed the government for not doing just that.

"Everybody knows it needs to be twinned," said Wildrose MLA Shayne Saskiw. "Yet here we are today, still with no clear timeline on when it will be done. It’s unacceptable.”

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