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Public Support for Automated Traffic Enforcement is Strong and Growing— Findings From a New IRC Study

MALVERN, Pa.— A new report by the Insurance Research Council (IRC) shows that public support for red light and speed cameras is strong and growing. The report, *Public Attitude Monitor, Issue 1, Highway Safety*, analyzes public opinion on a range of issues related to highway safety and traffic enforcement.

The survey found that 70 percent of the public strongly (39 percent) or somewhat (31 percent) favors the use of red light cameras that photograph the license plates of vehicles that run red lights. Sixty percent strongly (31 percent) or somewhat (29 percent) favors the use of speed camera systems that photograph the license plates of vehicles traveling far in excess of a speed limit. In 2001, 65 percent favored red light cameras and 52 percent favored speed cameras (Figure 1).

The survey also found strong public support for laws that ban the use of cell phones while driving. Among drivers who own a cell phone, 77 percent strongly (47 percent) or somewhat (30 percent) favor laws that ban the use of hand-held phones while driving.

Most of the driving public agrees that the use of cell phones while driving distracts drivers a great deal (65 percent) or somewhat (30 percent) and increases the likelihood of accidents a great deal (68 percent) or somewhat (26 percent). Forty-one percent had ever been in an accident or had a near-miss in which another driver was using a cell phone while driving, and 7 percent admit to an accident or near-miss in which they were using a phone while driving.

Nevertheless, many of these same drivers are frequent cell phone users. Sixty-one percent answer calls, 55 percent make calls, 22 percent read text messages, 17 percent send text messages, and 7 percent access the web—often or occasionally while driving (Figure 2). Younger drivers are more likely than older drivers to engage in each of these activities while driving, as are hands-free compared to hand-held phone users.

“The American public supports the use of automated enforcement devices to make highways safer,” explained Elizabeth A. Sprinkel, senior vice president of the IRC. “However, even though they recognize an association between cell phone use and driving accidents, they are reluctant to give up the convenience of using their phone while driving. In fact, the new hands-free technologies may be enabling drivers to use their phones more frequently, even for obviously dangerous activities such as reading and sending text messages.”

The report is based on a survey conducted by TRC, a market research company. The survey consisted of a self-administered online questionnaire completed by more than 1,005 members of an online consumer survey panel. Results were weighted to accurately represent the opinions of the total adult population of the United States. The online surveys were completed during a two-week period in late December 2006.

For more detailed information on the study's methodology and findings, contact Elizabeth Sprinkel by phone at (610) 644-2212, ext. 7568; by fax at (610) 640-5388; or by e-mail at irc@cpcuia.org. Or visit IRC's Web site at www.ircweb.org. Copies of the study are available at \$50 each in the U.S. (\$65 elsewhere) postpaid from the IRC, 718 Providence Road, Malvern, Pa. 19355-0715. Phone: (610) 644-2212, ext. 7569; Fax: (610) 640-5388.

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