

D.C. issues record \$1 billion in traffic and parking tickets, AAA calls it 'predatory'

wjla.com/features/i-team/dc-issues-a-record-1-billion-in-traffic-and-parking-tickets

Lisa Fletcher, ABC7

February 19, 2020



topics:

- [Land transport](#)
- [Moving Violation](#)
- [Parking](#)
- [Parking Violation](#)
- [Punishments](#)
- [Road Traffic Management](#)
- [Road safety](#)
- [Road transport](#)

WASHINGTON ([WJLA/ABC7](#)) – D.C. has long been considered one of the most onerous places in the country for traffic fines, seeing a steady climb year to year in tickets issued and revenue generated. But recently the District broke into stunning new territory, issuing more than \$1 billion in tickets in just three years.

I don't know another local jurisdiction in the entire nation that has generated as much money from traffic tickets, parking tickets and moving violations,"said John Townsend, Public Relations Manager of AAA Mid-Atlantic. "That tells us that things are out of control and out of hand in the District of Columbia.



AAA's John Townsend discusses documents with WJLA's Lisa Fletcher

Townsend closely monitors the District's ticketing behavior. He says this is a money-making operation that can't prove these high fines have made anyone safer.

In fact, he says they haven't found any evidence that shows the amount of the fine modifies a motorist's behavior.

"We've looked high and low," said Townsend. "We looked across the globe and we have not found one major study that proves there is a link between the amount of the fine and compliance."

We asked the District to show us its evidence that D.C.'s cameras, and the high fines, translate to fewer accidents, fewer injuries and fewer deaths.

The District told us it hasn't done any studies.

Yet the fines keep increasing, generating more money than alcohol, cigarette, motor vehicle, fuel and estate taxes and all revenue from licenses and permits, and personal property taxes combined.

Nearly three million motorists were on the receiving end of traffic and parking citations last year, totaling \$375 million.

In a study comparing the nation's 25 largest metro areas, D.C. had the highest traffic fines per capita by a long shot at \$170 per person, the next closest, Chicago, was \$101.

Yet we could not find any research or studies that indicated D.C.'s drivers, pedestrians or cyclists are any safer than in other states with lower fines.

Townsend says D.C. no longer plays by the rules, causing AAA to move toward drastic action.

"No one really believes this is about traffic safety any longer," said Townsend, "which is the reason we're withdrawing support for the automated enforcement program in the District."

That means AAA is likely to declare Washington, D.C. a "[traffic trap](#)" (or speed trap as it is commonly referred to) to its 60 million members. In 2005 AAA declared D.C. a "strict enforcement zone," one step below the "traffic trap" designation.

"It is predatory ticketing," said Townsend. "That's precisely what it is. And I defy the District to say otherwise."

One widely regarded metric for jurisdictions with effective automated traffic enforcement is that the number of tickets and fines consistently decreases in traffic camera locations. It indicates drivers are learning and responding to signs and other indicators to reduce speed or stop. Townsend says D.C.'s numbers show just the opposite, indicating the presence of speed traps - designed to surprise motorists and generate revenue, rather than alter driver behavior.