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Phoenix area

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Chandler is East Valley's leader in speed checks

[Chris Markham](#), Tribune

By the end of summer, Chandler will have more automated devices aimed at discouraging speeders than any other East Valley city.

[GRAPHIC: See the locations of Chandler speed signs](#)

The city has had red-light cameras for several years and last month began adding photo speed-on-green at 12 of its most dangerous intersections. And most recently, the City Council voted to spend nearly \$300,000 on 66 speed-reader signs that tell drivers how fast they're going. About one-third of the speed-reader signs are already up and working.

"I wanted to make sure people have ample warning," City Councilman Jeff Weninger said of the speed-reader signs. "If people slow down and don't get a ticket, that's a good thing no matter what prompted them to do it."

Many of the speed-reader signs, which are not precise enough to be used for speed enforcement, are being installed near 11 intersections that will soon have cameras snapping speeders and red-light runners.

To Weninger, the digital warnings should also show drivers that the new photo enforcement measures are not "just a cash cow" for the city.

The radar-equipped signs show oncoming drivers how fast they're going. The display flashes for vehicles going too fast, but switches off once drivers slow to a certain speed.

"The idea is to give drivers another visual reference to what their speed is," Chandler public works director Dan Cook said.

In the past, drivers were reminded of their speeds by road noise and bumpier rides. But as modern roads become smoother and newer vehicles get quieter, drivers can easily lose track of their speed, said Gary O'Dell, a spokesman for Information Display Co., which sold Chandler the speed-reader signs.

"Detroit's done a great job of making (cars) comfort zones," he said. "We've replaced that missing feedback."

Chandler officials expect to have the 66 signs, along with red-light and speed-on-green cameras, installed by the end of the summer. The speed-reader signs will be posted in all four directions at 16 intersections as well as along Hunt Highway at Cooper Road.

The order is a large one for Information Display Co., though the Oregon-based company says it's seeing a growing trend toward the warning signs.

"We think it's turned the corner. People are putting more and more of those in," O'Dell said. "It's rare to see it go all into one city."

Other East Valley cities also use the warning signs, though most rely on portable signs that can be stationed at problem spots.

Gilbert installed signs on Gilbert Road on each end of its downtown area in October 2005. But the town hasn't tracked their effectiveness.

"I don't know if they're slowing people down or not," Gilbert spokesman Greg Svelund said. "I hope they are."

Gilbert has no plans to install more speed-reader signs. The downtown area was a unique traffic situation since it is the town's only major north-south arterial with a large speed-limit change. The speed limit downtown is 25 mph.

"We've been trying to get people to slow down there for years," Svelund said.

But if the signs are causing drivers to slow down now, it may just be a temporary fix.

Phoenix, which has about six locations with speed-reader signs, only has one in a non-school zone. It's also the only one that operates 24 hours a day and has no accompanying camera enforcement mechanism — like in Gilbert.

"The value of that sign has diminished tremendously," said Mike Cynecki, Phoenix traffic engineering supervisor. "It took awhile, but after awhile the novelty effect wore off."

In Mesa, police officials plant speed-reader trailers in areas where residents have complained about speeders. That city installed one permanent warning sign near Rhodes Junior High School in January 2006, after a boy was struck and killed by a speeding car.

Speed-reader signs

Scottsdale: Has a few portable speed-reader signs placed in problem areas, but no permanent signs.

Mesa: Has one permanent speed-reader sign on Baseline Road near Rhodes Junior High School. The city also uses portable signs in problem areas.

Tempe: Does not use speed-reader signs.

Gilbert: Has two speed-reader signs on Gilbert Road, one at each end of the town's downtown area. The town also uses portable signs.

Chandler: Plans to have 66 speed-reader signs up by the end of summer. The city also uses portable signs.