



Written by [Bruce Walker](#) on March 1, 2012

## No Speeding Ticket for Councilwoman Driving 105 mph

Prince George's County in Maryland has been a dangerous place for drivers and pedestrians. In 2005, for example, the county saw a 100-percent increase in pedestrian fatalities and a 120-percent increase in traffic fatalities. The situation has gotten so bad that in October 2011, Maryland Governor Martin O'Malley announced a special safety initiative for traffic in that county.



Prince George's County Police Department Chief Roberto Hylton at the time said:

For too long traffic crashes have plagued Prince George's County, killing more than 1200 of our citizens over the last 10 years. Through a new dedicated traffic resource group and other public safety outreach initiatives, we are taking action to prevent these crashes not only around the Capital Beltway, but throughout our great County.

Colonel Terrence Sheridan, Superintendent of the Maryland State Police, provided more details:

A critical strategy in the plan includes "Operation Centipede," an ongoing enforcement effort that employs high visibility patrols to target violators, slow traffic, and perhaps most importantly increase public awareness of police presence, which helps keep drivers safe drivers. So far troopers working Operation Centipede alone have issued more than 2,250 citations and warnings.

Karen Toles (pictured above) sits on the Prince George's County Council. On February 22, the councilwoman was clocked by the Prince George's County Police Department as [traveling at more than 105 mph](#) on the Capital Beltway which was 50 mph over the legal speed limit. Police originally would not state how fast she was driving, but that information was later released.

Councilwoman Toles was driving around noon, which would be one of the busiest periods of the day for traffic. Police not only noted her extremely high speed, but also that she was changing lanes illegally. The vehicle that Councilwoman Toles was driving was also owned by Prince George's County.

What happened? Councilwoman Toles was not given a speeding ticket, but received a warning instead. She did, however, receive a \$90 ticket for an unsafe lane change. Prince George's County police said that the warning was "consistent with the typical discretion applied by police officers to speeding motorists." Critics say that seems remarkable. Driving 105 mph during rush hour traffic on a 55 mph road earns a warning? That may explain the high death rate on the roads of Prince George's County, Maryland. Police did say, however, that the video camera record of the incident is now being reviewed



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to make sure that the officer made the correct decision.

There were other unusual circumstances surrounding this incident. Although all traffic citations are listed online by Prince George's County the next working day, there was no record of any traffic citation involving Councilwoman Toles in the system at all. No explanation has been given. Interestingly, Prince George's County has boasted of an "Automated Speed Enforcement Program" that will by camera determine the speed of a vehicle in certain traffic zones and if the vehicle is traveling 12 mph over the speed limit, a traffic citation for speeding will automatically be generated. The councilwoman obviously was not traveling in those areas.

Although she has not been cited for traveling 50 mph faster than allowed by law, the traffic records of Prince George's County do show that Councilwoman Toles has received recent citations by the county police for unsafe driving. In September 2010, she was cited for "driving off the roadway while passing another vehicle" and in March 2010, Ms. Toles was cited for an unsafe lane change. Maj. James Harper, who was the officer in charge on the day of the incident, defended the officer's action: "We have to actually attest that the person was either captured on a radar device or was paced. The officer was trying to catch up the whole time, so he or she could not actually write a citation."

What did the councilwoman have to say about her actions? She has refused to answer any questions from the media, but she did state formally, "I was leaving a meeting and was late for my next appointment. I consider moving violations serious matters and I regret the incident. I intend to pay the appropriate fine for these traffic violations."

On February 29, Councilwoman Toles participated in a public safety discussion with the police department. Howard Washington, who attended the meeting, rejected the integrity of what happened: "They don't want to face facts. That's absurd. Councilwoman or no councilwoman, she broke the law."

Observers note that it will be interesting to see if the councilwoman agrees to relinquish her privacy interest and allow the media to review her noontime 105-mph driving around her constituents.



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