



Law enforcement agencies nationwide have used checkpoints to catch drunk drivers even though data suggests that it is an ineffective method.

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Where's the meat? Checkpoints ineffective way to address DUI

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As we dig into some turkey and mashed potatoes, Georgia police are cooking up something of their own. Law enforcement agencies will once again spend the Thanksgiving holiday trying to catch drunk drivers by using sobriety checkpoints.

Unfortunately, these roadblocks are not only a misuse of police manpower, but they funnel scarce taxpayer dollars away from the most effective way to catch drunk drivers.

Skeptical? The numbers speak for themselves. Consider that over a million vehicles went through 1,469 California sobriety checkpoints in 2008. Police arrested just one-third of 1 percent of those motorists for drunk driving.

A similar analysis found that in 2007, less than one percent of the more than 181,000 drivers stopped at Pennsylvania checkpoints were arrested.

That's hardly a glaring success. But there's a different way to catch drunk drivers — called roving patrols — that allows police to do it much more efficiently and at less of a cost to taxpayers.

A roving patrol is when police officers drive around and actively seek out drunk and dangerous drivers instead of passively waiting around at a roadblock for offenders to show up.

Patrols are up to 10 times more effective than checkpoints, according

to testimony by a Pennsylvania Department of Transportation official.

Case in point: Over the holiday season in Delaware last year, state police arrested 30 drunk drivers at sobriety checkpoints, compared with 276 drunk drivers taken off the roads by roving patrols during the same time.

Supporters will tell you that checkpoints are a deterrent. But there's no measure of this unseen "deterrence." Chronic drunk drivers can simply figure out where a checkpoint will be and plan an alternate route.

And that's precisely the problem with checkpoints: They're easy to avoid. These roadblocks are highly visible by design and publicized in advance (a requirement in many states). Friends can text warnings to each other.

New iPhone and GPS applications even alert users to checkpoint locations. It's easy for chronic drunk drivers to take a different course — so if a main road is blocked, they'll take the quiet neighborhood route instead.

Putting all their eggs in one basket is also a costly exercise for police. Checkpoints can cost over \$10,000 each time they're set up, compared to \$300 for each roving patrol. What taxpayers are paying for with checkpoints, then, is little more than an expensive publicity stunt that has little meat on its bones.

If Georgia police want to carve out a cost-effective strategy, they'll

defund checkpoints and beef up roving patrol efforts. In addition to stopping drunk drivers, patrols also catch drivers engaging in any number of other dangerous activities, like reckless speeding, aggressive driving, and texting while driving.

It's hard to overstate the importance of a roving patrol strategy that cracks down on a wide range of traffic offenders. Why? Because a number of these other driving behaviors are actually more dangerous than driving drunk.

Statistics show that talking on a cell phone, driving while drowsy, and traveling a mere 7 mph above the speed limit are all riskier than driving with a BAC (blood alcohol concentration) of 0.08 percent, the legal arrest threshold for drunk driving.

But sobriety checkpoints won't catch drivers who are speeding, swerving, texting, or driving aggressively. What they will do is waste taxpayer dollars, inconvenience thousands of responsible drivers, and fail to stop the most dangerous chronic drunk drivers.

Let's see: A ten-fold increase in drunk driving arrests, or a stationary PR stunt? This Thanksgiving, Georgia police ought to give up checkpoints cold turkey and adopt the only strategy that offers any gravy: roving patrols.

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