

New traffic ticket diversion program coming

By Frank Boyett

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Got popped for a traffic ticket? You may be able to rehabilitate yourself in the near future.

County Attorney Steve Gold and assistant Kyle Evans laid out a proposal Tuesday to Henderson Fiscal Court for a new Traffic Diversion Program through which ticket recipients may be able to become better drivers — and save themselves some time and money in the process. Fiscal court liked the idea well enough to authorize spending up to \$13,000 to buy a driving simulator, which is the core of the program. "We think we might be able to get it down into the \$7,000 or \$8,000 range," Gold said.

"I think there actually would be no cost to the county in just a little while," said Magistrate Charles Alexander, who made the motion to authorize the purchase. "The people who are going to pay for it are the people who are going to use it."

"I think it's well worth the investment," said Judge-executive Hugh McCormick, commending the county attorney and sheriff's offices for their initiative.

The program, which requires no additional personnel, is modeled after one in Fayette County, and similar to ones used in other states. Currently, Gold said, if someone gets a ticket they can either pre-pay it or go to court, where they may be sent to state traffic school if eligible. The problem with state traffic school, he said, is that it "is somebody talking at you for three and a half hours."

The new traffic diversion program instead will allow local ticket recipients to pay a flat fee of \$100 — about \$40 less than usual court costs. They will have to sign an agreement saying they will complete the safety training on a driving simulator, perform

two hours of community service at a church or non-profit, and receive no further violations for at least six months.

The sheriff's office will teach a one-hour safety class that will consist of 30 minutes on safe driving and 30 minutes on the simulator or watching others on the simulator.

"With this simulator there are going to be a lot more hands-on practical skills taught," Gold said, adding that it provides "real hands-on driving experience" and can be set up to simulate the vehicle the student drives on a regular basis.

"We're going to be able to put a deer out in front of somebody and they'll be scored as they drive through."

Anyone who doesn't meet the terms of the agreement will be expelled from the program — forfeiting their fee — and have to go through the regular court system.

Gold noted that the program will provide for safer drivers and roads, increased volunteer hours at non-profits and churches, plus savings in time and money to ticketed individuals.

Those who successfully complete the program will have the ticket dismissed, thereby avoiding higher insurance costs.

Not every ticket violation will be eligible. For instance, commercial driver license holders will not be eligible, nor will those charged with such things as DUI, reckless driving, eluding police, racing, failing to stop for a school bus or failing to yield to an emergency vehicle, as well as others.

"It's going to lead to safer roads and better drivers," said Gold.

"This is not only going to be best for the individual, it's going to be best for the county."



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