



The Unticketing Cerro Gordo campaign was designed to reduce incidents of speeding and improve relations between communities and law enforcement in Cerro Gordo County.

**Obey The Law And Win!**

**Unticketing Cerro Gordo**

This summer, join **Unticketing Cerro Gordo** to win prizes like store gift cards just for **driving safely and observing the speed limit!**

To join in, scan the QR code or visit [www.unticketing.org](http://www.unticketing.org)

Made possible by Clear Lake Police Department, Mason City Police Department, Cerro Gordo County Sheriff, Iowa Highway Research Board, and participating merchants.

# RESEARCH SOLUTIONS

## Encouraging better driver behavior with rewards and incentives

Drivers who are caught violating a traffic law are usually penalized with a fine or other measure to curb the negative behavior. Though this approach can be effective, it requires a high level of enforcement that can be labor-intensive, expensive, hazardous, and difficult to sustain. Studies have shown that incentives can be just as motivating to change behavior. In this project, researchers collaborated with three Iowa law enforcement agencies to investigate the impacts of rewards and positive reinforcement on driver behavior. The results offer local communities a blueprint for similar initiatives in the future.

### THE NEED

Traditionally drivers who violate speed limits and other traffic laws are issued a fine or other penalty. Enforcement works best when drivers believe law enforcement officers could be present anytime, anywhere. But this level of policing has many drawbacks: It can be cost-prohibitive and unsafe for officers conducting stops in live traffic,

can increase tensions between communities and law enforcement agencies, and can be difficult to sustain due to staffing constraints. Despite evidence that incentives can be as effective at encouraging good driving behavior as penalties, most agencies don't include incentives in their policing programs.

To explore whether rewards and incentives can successfully increase traffic law compliance in Iowa, this project developed a traffic safety campaign. At its core was a contest that awarded small prizes to participating drivers who complied with local speed limits and other traffic laws.



**“This project showed that rewarding drivers for doing the right thing can be an effective yet much more positive approach to encouraging good behavior than giving out fines or other penalties for routine traffic violations.”**

**— WADE WEISS,**  
Greene County Engineer

## RESEARCH APPROACH

A literature search identified public safety campaigns that have been conducted to prevent speeding. With this insight, researchers developed a framework for the contest. Three Cerro Gordo County law enforcement agencies — the Clear Lake Police Department, Mason City Police Department, and Cerro Gordo Sheriff's Office — were invited to participate.

A website for the new “Unticketing Cerro Gordo” campaign provided detailed information and encouraged area drivers to opt in to the 12-week program, held between May and August 2023. Marketing and promotions included flyers distributed through local businesses and government offices, press releases sent to local media outlets, and social media posts. Area retailers donated gift cards and other small prizes, ranging from \$10 to \$35.

When officers from the three law enforcement agencies observed drivers complying with local speed limits during routine traffic patrols, the vehicle's license plate number was cross-referenced with the list of volunteer participants and entered into a lottery. Winners were selected at random during six drawings, and prizes were distributed by mail.

Speed comparisons before, during, and after the Unticketing campaign were conducted at selected sites in Cerro

Gordo County to evaluate changes in driver behavior. In addition, people who live, work, and spend time in the area were surveyed before and after the campaign to gauge public perception about traffic safety and the campaign.

## WHAT IOWA LEARNED

The Unticketing campaign was executed successfully and can offer a blueprint for other communities seeking to implement a similar program. The speed comparisons and surveys showed that this campaign improved driver attitudes about traffic safety in Cerro Gordo County and led to a modest reduction in speeding. Additionally, the promotional materials and targeted efforts effectively generated interest in the program within the community and helped to solicit volunteer participants and collect donations from local businesses. Law enforcement officials reported that the project generated positive publicity for their agencies.

One challenge noted during the campaign was a shortage of officers available to monitor good behavior. In future campaigns, an automatic license plate reader could prove beneficial to mitigate this issue and increase the instances of observed good driving eligible for rewards. This project also produced a guidebook that explains the campaign's process, from selecting sites and soliciting driver participants to working with community members,

securing prizes, and assessing the program's effectiveness.

## PUTTING IT TO WORK

With guidance and a successful example that other communities in Iowa can follow, the Unticketing campaign offers new evidence for using incentives and rewards over the traditional approach to traffic law enforcement.

## ABOUT THIS PROJECT

**PROJECT NAME:** [Unticketing: An Upside-Down Approach to Speed Compliance](#) | [Final Report](#) | [Technical Brief](#)

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