



DATE: March 4, 2015

TO: Senate Committee on Business and Transportation

FROM: Amy Joyce, Legislative Liaison

SUBJECT: SB 533, Motorcycles proceed on “dead red” light

INTRODUCTION

The bill allows a motorcycle rider to proceed through a signaled intersection if the signal fails to detect the presence of a motorcycle. The Department has safety concerns.

DISCUSSION

Senate Bill 533 proposes to allow motorcyclists to proceed through a traffic signal on a red light if the signal does not activate (commonly called a “dead red”). Motorcyclist may proceed straight ahead or turn once they have waited through one light cycle. For multiple motorcyclists on group rides, each operator will need to stop and obey the terms of the bill.

ODOT has concerns about the safety of the practice proposed in SB 533. The purpose of traffic engineering and traffic law is to keep people from being in the same place at the same time. The “behavior” of vehicles needs to be predictable to all highway users. The more gray area created in law – less predictability - introduces a higher level of risk. Allowing motorcyclists to continue on at a red light will create unpredictability for those on the green light segment of the intersection, whether motor vehicle operators, bicyclists, or pedestrians.

Oregon law requires all motorcyclists to take an approved motorcycle safety training course (TEAM OREGON) to be issued an endorsement to legally ride. Motorcyclists are instructed in both the training curriculum and the Oregon Motorcycle Manual on how to position their motorcycle over a traffic loop or sensor. Proper handling of the motorcycle should result in the light sensor being tripped. In the rare case that the sensor is malfunctioning or mis-calibrated, the most important result would be for the person encountering that to notify the responsible jurisdiction so it can be fixed. Traffic control detection failures are already listed as one of the highest priorities for repair (response time required within hours, including weekends and holidays, as it can be a safety issue).

In addition, traffic signal technology is improving the detection of motorcycles and even bicycles. ODOT has had good results with infrared-based detection and radar-based detection. Other jurisdictions report good results with camera-based detection. These technologies do a better job of scanning more of a lane as a vehicle approaches a traffic signal.

Finally, like most other jurisdictions Oregon is dealing with varying configurations of what is legally a “motorcycle” (ORS 801.365). Unconventional vehicles such as the Polaris Slingshot

and T-Rex would be allowed to proceed through the intersection under this bill. These vehicles look much like passenger automobiles (attached) but are motorcycles by law because they have only three wheels. Consequently, other traffic users may be confused when they observe these vehicles proceeding through a traffic signal.

SUMMARY

Even though currently illegal, ODOT believes this is a common practice among motorcyclists. There are ways to correct the problem without simply making the behavior legal. Allowing a motorcyclist to proceed through a signal on red reduces predictability and therefore may increase the crash risk. Unconventional vehicles add to the confusion. ODOT sees benefit, instead, in continuing to educate motorcycle riders about proper positioning the motorcycle on traffic loops and sensors rather than granting special privileges. Updated technology may help with this issue.

Attachment: Photos of unconventional “motorcycles”



Polaris Slingshot



T-Rex