

DATE: March 4, 2015
TO: Senate Business and Transportation Committee
FROM: Steve Garets, Director, TEAM OREGON Motorcycle Safety Program
SUBJECT: Senate Bill 533

Introduction

TEAM OREGON does not support SB 533, which would allow motorcyclists and bicyclists to proceed through a red traffic light that fails to detect the vehicle.

Discussion

A law allowing some vehicle types to bypass traffic controls is a safety concern for motorcyclists and the general public. Giving two conflicting vehicles the right of way could lead to increased crashes and injuries, particularly to motorcyclists and bicyclists, who are more vulnerable than drivers of passenger vehicles.

There are multiple types of vehicle detection devices in use in Oregon. The technology in use is varied and evolving, and at most intersections in Oregon, the devices correctly recognize and respond to motorcycles and bicycles. Traffic control programming (i.e. the timing of traffic lights) varies among jurisdictions, time of day and day of week. These devices and programs could easily be misjudged by an impatient rider as “failing to detect” their vehicle and perceived as permission to proceed when it is not safe to do so.

Of particular concern is the probability of groups of motorcyclists or bicyclists proceeding through a red traffic signal. In the motorcycling community, riding as a group is common practice. Sometimes groups travel in pairs or threes; other times they number in the dozens or hundreds. However, these groups often prioritize “staying together” over personal safety and decision making. If a traffic control device fails to detect the vehicles, the group is likely to proceed as one large group. While proceeding through a red light may be legal and safe for the first rider, it may not be safe (or legal) for the next rider. Riders at the back of a large group may proceed through a red light without regard for other traffic, thinking only of staying with the group. This scenario could cause a serious problem with conflicting traffic that also has the right of way and result in crashes, injuries and fatalities.

Summary

Based on the discussion above, TEAM OREGON does not support SB 533 because it does not serve motorcycle safety.