



**DATE:** April 2, 2015

**TO:** Senate Committee on Judiciary

**FROM:** Amy Joyce, Legislative Liaison

**SUBJECT:** SB 694, motorcycle lane splitting

## INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 694 would allow motorcycles and mopeds to pass vehicles in the same lane or travel between lanes of traffic during traffic slow-downs. This practice is commonly known as lane splitting (also lane sharing or lane filtering). The department has safety concerns about this bill.

## DISCUSSION

Lane splitting can be dangerous for motorists for several reasons. For the motorcyclist, the gap between vehicles would be very narrow. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) a motorcycle takes up three-fourths of the space of a car in traffic. Simply put, operating between lanes is dangerous. Also, the motorcyclist risks unexpected behaviors from those in passenger vehicles around them. Whether initiating a slow lane change or opening the vehicle door in stopped traffic, drivers and passengers who are in very close proximity may inadvertently injure the motorcyclist.

The department has heard from advocates for lane splitting that one reason in favor of the idea is concern for motorcyclists being rear-ended in stopped or slowed traffic. An eight-year survey of Oregon crash data (2005-2013) looked at instances when a motorcyclist was stopped on a main freeway (a rough approximation of the highways covered by the -1 amendment). In total over the eight years the crash data was this:

- 14 crashes on main highways (not including ramps or connections)
- 0 fatalities
- 21 injuries

Considering Oregon has approximately 1,100 motorcyclist injuries annually (or about 8,800 total in eight years), the data suggests the benefit would be, at most, miniscule. Comparatively, in 2014 motorcyclists accounted for 13% of all Oregon fatal crashes – 45 lives lost<sup>1</sup> – although representing only 9% of driving privileges and less than 1% of the vehicle registrations. Oregon crash data reveals that 75-80% of Oregon motorcycle fatalities each year are caused by the motorcyclists themselves – not other drivers. This data tends to indicate we should not be putting motorcyclists in even riskier situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Oregon's 2014 crash data is preliminary, and expected to be finalized in a few months.

Finally, no state authorizes lane splitting. Lane sharing is practiced in California, although it is neither expressly allowed nor prohibited in statute. The University of California at Berkeley has been conducting a study of motorcycle crashes and lane splitting. However, after briefly releasing their report, they withdrew it. Similarly, the California State Patrol issued guidelines on lane splitting, and then withdrew them.

## **SUMMARY**

ODOT has safety concerns about Senate Bill 694 due to the very close proximity of the motorcyclist to the adjacent motor vehicles and risk of crash. Oregon crash data does not support this being a safety solution for rear-end crashes. No other state has codified lane splitting.