



Oregon

Kate Brown, Governor

Department of Transportation

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DATE: February 20, 2019

TO: Joint Committee on Transportation

FROM: Troy Costales, Administrator
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SUBJECT: House Bill 2314 – Motorcycle Lane Splitting

INTRODUCTION

House Bill 2314 changes Oregon laws to allow two-wheel motorcycles and mopeds to pass other vehicles, on the left or right side within one lane, in certain conditions. ODOT is opposed to HB 2314. It would allow unsafe practices.

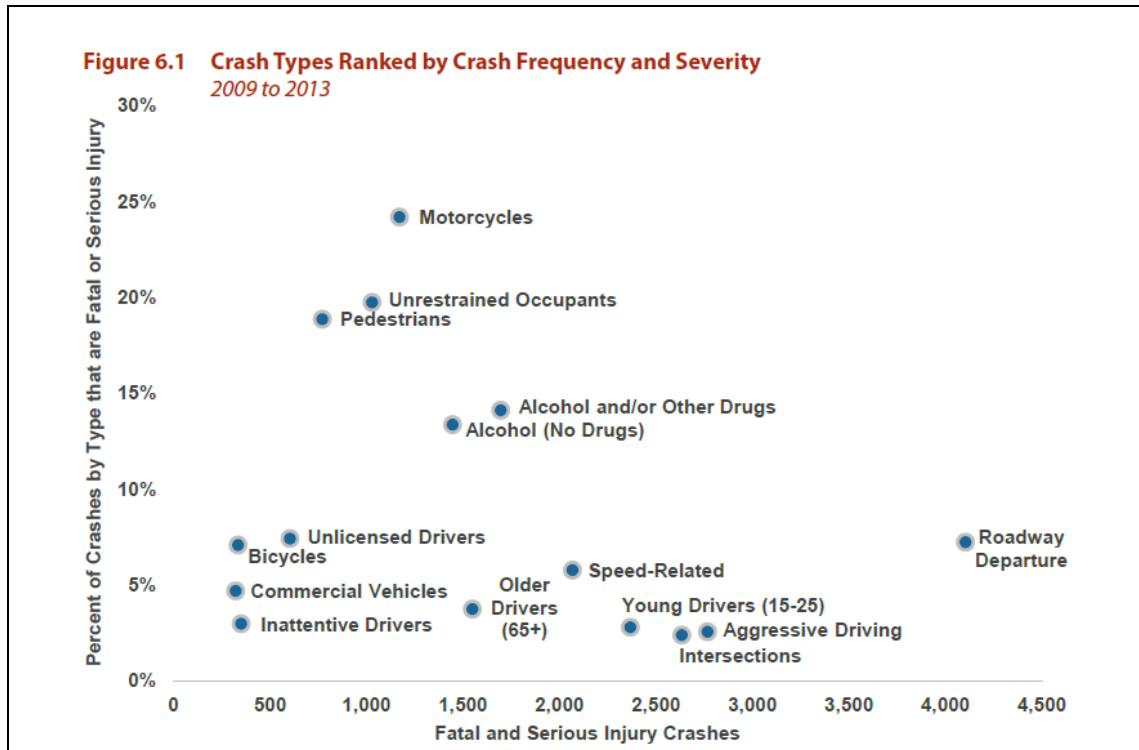
DISCUSSION

House Bill 2314 allows a motorcycle or moped to pass other vehicles in the same lane, going in the same direction of travel (known as lane splitting among other terms), on all roadways, under certain conditions. The law changes would allow motorcycles and mopeds to travel at 20 MPH or less when traffic has slowed to 10 MPH or less on all roadways with a 50 MPH or greater speed limit or designation. The bill would also allow motorcycles to pass at intersections to queue at the front alongside other vehicles. ODOT is opposed to the bill as it creates an unsafe condition for motorcycles and mopeds, as well as other vehicles using the highway system.

There are significant safety concerns with motorcycles lane splitting. A motorcycle travelling between rows of moving vehicles in the same lane, including near the center line next to oncoming traffic that may be going at normal speed, is vulnerable to multiple threats including other vehicles changing lanes, turning, or crossing through the stopped traffic. Passenger vehicle safety and liability is also of concern as lane-sharing will reduce an operator's ability to predict and, therefore, react to unexpected traffic moving around them.

Frequency and Severity Comparison

There are significant safety concerns with motorcycles lane splitting. A motorcyclist travelling between rows of moving vehicles, including near the center line next to oncoming traffic that may be going at normal speed, is vulnerable to multiple threats. They include other vehicles changing lanes, turning, or crossing through stopped traffic. Passenger vehicle safety and liability is also of concern as lane-sharing will reduce an operator's ability to predict and, therefore, react to unexpected traffic moving around them.



A frequent argument to allow lane splitting is that it makes motorcyclists safer, by allowing them to move from a stopped line of traffic and avoid being rear-ended. Oregon crash data shows that rear-end crashes involving motorcycles are extremely rare, and the majority of the rear-end crashes involving a motorcycle occur when the motorcycle strikes the vehicle ahead.

Lane splitting is prohibited in all states except California. According to a study on lane splitting in California, 17 percent of motorcycle crashes during the study period involved lane splitting. That practice is not legal in Oregon, and our data has found no lane splitting crashes. Therefore, those crashes that occurred in California are all crashes that would not happen here in Oregon under current law. Several studies from Europe indicate the added risk for riding between lanes of traffic may be as high as 3.94 times greater.

Safe Riding

Safe motorcycle riding includes maintaining open paths of travel in an emergency. Managing the space in front, behind, and to both sides provides the rider the highest level of safety cushion and escape should something encroach in any of those spaces. The same is true for passenger cars and trucks. Allowing motorcycles to occupy the safety space around other vehicles increases the odds of a crash for all the vehicles in that space.

The California study states “. . . lane-splitting riders often put themselves closer to other vehicles than they otherwise would. This proximity reduces the time riders have to identify and react to changes in the behaviors of other motorists.” Closing off the safety cushion increases the risk of potential injury from other vehicles or small mistakes made by the motorcyclist that otherwise might be corrected without incident.

Other Road Users

The proposed legislation sends mixed messages to other drivers. For example, under current law, motorists are not permitted to deprive a motorcycle or moped of a full lane (ORS 811.385), and all drivers are required to drive within a single lane (ORS 811.370). Allowing motorcycles to operate in the same lane alongside another vehicle complicates and brings about questions for liability should the motorcyclist strike a vehicle that is next to them or if another vehicle is changing lanes.

In consecutive statewide Oregon Public Opinion surveys, respondents were asked if they would support a new law giving motorcyclists the right to “lane split” while driving. Results continue to be overwhelming with 80.5 percent of those polled opposing such a law change. Almost 20 percent of those surveyed carried a motorcycle endorsement. Over 73 percent of the motorcyclists in the survey opposed such a law change. Comments from all respondents indicate they believe the lane splitting practice is dangerous, distracting, and will cause problems for all motorists.

Finally, the bill allows mopeds to exercise this practice, which is limited to roads signed for speeds of 50 MPH or greater. By law, mopeds may operate at 30 MPH maximum.

SUMMARY

ODOT opposes the passage of HB 2314, allowing motorcyclists and mopeds to travel alongside other vehicles in the same lane, on the left or right, under certain conditions. The bill greatly increases the risk of motorcycle and moped riders, the practice is not supported by Oregonians, and creates a mixed message for all road users. Should this bill become law, the safety of motorcyclists in Oregon will be compromised.