

PBOT

PORTLAND BUREAU OF TRANSPORTATION

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Jo Ann Hardesty Commissioner **Chris Warner** Director

March 1, 2021

Senator Lee Beyer, Co-Chair
Representative Susan McLain, Co-Chair
Joint Committee on Transportation
900 Court Street, NE
Salem, OR 97301

Dear Co-Chairs Beyer and McLain and Members of the Committee:

As in previous Legislative sessions, the City of Portland Bureau of Transportation is concerned about the safety of motorcycle lane-splitting and opposes Senate Bill 574. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the bill.

Portland is a Vision Zero city committed to eliminating traffic deaths and serious injuries on our streets. We continue to see motorcyclists disproportionately killed in traffic crashes. Over the past five years, 38 motorcyclists have died in Portland, accounting for 17% of Portland's traffic deaths. Across the U.S., the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA) found that motorcyclist fatalities occurred nearly 27 times more frequently than car-related fatalities in 2018 (the most recent year for which national crash data is available). With motorcyclists already disproportionately involved in the most serious crashes, lane-splitting would increase potential conflicts between motorcyclists and drivers.

While the lane-splitting parameters in SB 574 are narrow, we are concerned that the practice of lane-splitting would spill onto city streets. A UC Berkeley study, *Motorcycle Lane-splitting and Safety in California (2015)*, found that 17% of motorcycle crashes in California involved lane splitting during the 14-month study period. It also found that of the lane-splitting crashes, motorcyclists rear-ended other vehicles in 38.4% of the crashes, compared to non-lane-splitting crashes where motorcyclists rear-ended other vehicles in 15.7% of the crashes. In addition, on February 1 of this year, France ended a five-year lane-splitting trial because there was a 12% increase in motorcycle crashes during the trial period. Conditions allowed for lane-splitting in California and France are different than conditions outlined in SB 574, but the studies still raise concerns about the potential for increased crashes in Oregon.

Beyond safety, two additional arguments made in support of lane-splitting are congestion relief and environmental benefits. In fact, motorcycles make up a very small percentage of vehicles in the Portland metro area and there is no peer-reviewed published research that lane-splitting reduces congestion. A lane-splitting trial in New South Wales, Australia found no congestion relief when lane-splitting was allowed, despite 4% of trips being made by motorcycle. By comparison, the percentage of motorcycles on Portland area freeways is less than one-half of one percent. Further, the potential for increased crashes due to lane-splitting could actually increase congestion. In a highway crash, it can take hours for traffic flow to recover due to collision response, investigation, and clearing the crash site.



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Despite motorcycles achieving high gas mileage (on average 50-80 miles per gallon), they have mixed impact on air quality. With high fuel efficiency, motorcycles emit less carbon dioxide than the average car, however they also emit far higher amounts of smog-forming pollutants (hydrocarbons) and carbon monoxide. Trading one type of pollutant for another does not meaningfully advance our city or state environmental goals. Before advancing this new policy, we recommend ODOT study the congestion and air quality benefits and impacts of legalized lane-splitting.

Finally, the language in SB 574 should be clarified. Section 1 (3)(b)(F) states, "Is driving on a highway for which the speed limit established in ORS 811.111 *or* the designated speed posted under ORS 810.180 is 50 miles per hour or higher." With the "*or*" it is possible that lane-splitting could be allowed on streets with a speed established under ORS 811.111, which designates Oregon's statutory speeds. Should this bill move forward, PBOT urges the co-sponsors to clarify the language and specify that this legislation only applies to roads posted 50 miles per hour or higher.

Based on research, crash data and on-the-ground knowledge, the Portland Bureau of Transportation remains concerned about the safety impacts, and lack of air quality or congestion benefits, that would come with legalizing lane-splitting in Oregon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Chris Warner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Chris Warner
Director, Portland Bureau of Transportation
City of Portland, Oregon