

TO: The Oregon House Committee on Transportation and Economic Development
FR: Cynthia J. Strauss
DA: May 15, 2015
RE: Support for SB 694A

Chair McKeown and Members of the Committee:

I am writing to testify in support of SB 694A, which allows motorcycles to ride between lanes of cars when traffic is stop-and-go on the freeways. This would be a significant step in improving moto commuting, both for the safety of the riders as well as reducing time for everyone to reach their destinations.

I began to ride a scooter while in school, to save money on gas and parking. Since then I've become an avid motorcyclist and ride an average of 10,000 miles per year. I have the luxury of also having an SUV, which of course is not easy on gas or parking. I'm very safety conscious and take riding classes every year to continue learning and training for emergency situations.

I am originally from California (relocated to Oregon 15 years ago) where motorcycles and cars share the roads without a second thought. Presently I live in Beaverton and work in Lake Oswego as a Licensed Professional Counselor. My commute is mostly highway 217 and it takes anywhere from 16 to 52 minutes to travel 9 miles.

Moto commuters face a different set of challenges when heading in to work. We need to think about the regular things such as: when to leave, how bad traffic is, do I have gas etc. And we also consider other variables such as: carrying lunch, clothes, briefcase etc. and especially the weather forecast and if it will be dark when I leave the office. Riding in the dark and the rain is especially risky due to low visibility and braking capacity. If the variables add up so it looks like I'd be riding in the dark and the rain and then stuck in rush hour traffic with irritable drivers, well that's too much and I'll take my SUV that day instead.

If I was able to share lanes through bad traffic, I would be much more likely to ride daily. It would only take half as long and it's safer between cars than in front or behind them when traffic is lurching along accelerating and braking. Fortunately though I've never had a serious incident while riding, a couple things have happened that dramatically influenced my opinion about the topic of lane-splitting.

The only time I really needed to get between cars was three years ago on a hot day when traffic was heavy on the highway 405S bridge in Portland. My old bike has no radiator (it is cooled by air when the bike is moving) and was overheating into the red zone. As I watched the temperature rise and rise, I decided a ticket would be less expensive than a blown engine...I turned it off, tiptoed the bike onto the right shoulder and rolled down the hill. If lane-splitting had been legal, I would have been slowly moving all the way through and wouldn't have overheated.

The other thing that happened was last summer when I was rear-ended on the 185th off-ramp of highway 26 in Aloha. The traffic was backed up, so when I exited I had to brake hard – then looked in my mirror and saw someone coming up very fast behind! I swerved onto the shoulder, but so did he and hit me anyway. I am so lucky I was driving and not riding right then – that was one of the scariest moments of my life. I honestly think I would have been killed on my bike. If motorcycles and scooters are allowed to pull up between the cars, they won't get hit from behind in situations like these.

Please vote in favor of SB 694A. Allowing bikes to slip into the open spaces will help keep us safer. And it will encourage fellow riders to take their bike instead of their car/SUV and be one more step in reducing gridlock and commuter frustration as people get on their way a bit sooner. Maybe it will even inspire other drivers to learn to ride and someday reduce the overall number of cars on the road.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of SB 694A, I ask your vote in favor of the bill and hope you will send it to the House Floor.

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