



DATE: March 20, 2017

TO: Senate Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Troy Costales, Administrator
Transportation Safety Division

SUBJECT: SB 385 – Motorcycle Lane Splitting

INTRODUCTION

Senate Bill 385 changes Oregon law to allow motorcycles and mopeds to travel between lanes of traffic in certain conditions. ODOT is opposed to SB 385 and is concerned that the bill would allow unsafe practices.

DISCUSSION

Senate Bill 385 allows a motorcycle or moped to travel between lanes of traffic (known as lane splitting, and other terms) going in the same direction of travel on a multi-lane highway under certain conditions. It would allow them to travel at 20 MPH or less when traffic has slowed to 10 MPH or less on highways with a 50 MPH speed limit or designation. ODOT is opposed to the bill as it creates an unsafe condition for motorcycles and mopeds, as well as the other vehicles using the highway system.

There are significant safety concerns with motorcycle lane splitting. A motorcycle traveling between rows of moving vehicles in the same lane is vulnerable to different threats, such as vehicles suddenly changing lanes or vehicles entering from the side. Passenger vehicle safety is also of concern as lane-sharing may reduce an operator's ability to predict, and therefore, react to traffic movement around them.

Even without lane splitting, motorcycling is 25-29 times riskier than travelling in a passenger car; lane splitting at any speed adds even more risk. An analysis of Oregon crash data shows that the majority of rear-end crashes involving a motorcyclist occur when a motorcycle is the vehicle striking the one ahead of it.

Lane splitting is prohibited in all states except California. According to a California study on lane splitting in that state, California experienced 17 percent more crashes involving motorcyclists due to lane splitting. Several studies from Europe indicate the added risk for riding between lanes of traffic may be as high as 394 percent riskier.

Safe 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. 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.

The proposed legislation sends mixed messages to 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 (811.370). It also would further complicate questions about liability should a motorcyclist strike a vehicle that is changing lanes, or vice-versa.

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 overwhelmingly indicate (82%) that Oregonians do not support such a law. Comments from respondents indicate they believe the practice is dangerous, distracting and will cause problems for motorists.

SUMMARY

ODOT opposes passage of SB 385—allowing for motorcycles and mopeds to travel between lanes of traffic under certain conditions. The bill greatly increases the risk to motorcycle and moped riders, the practice is not supported by Oregonians, and creates mixed messages for drivers. Should the bill become law, the safety of motorcyclists in Oregon will be compromised.

Sources

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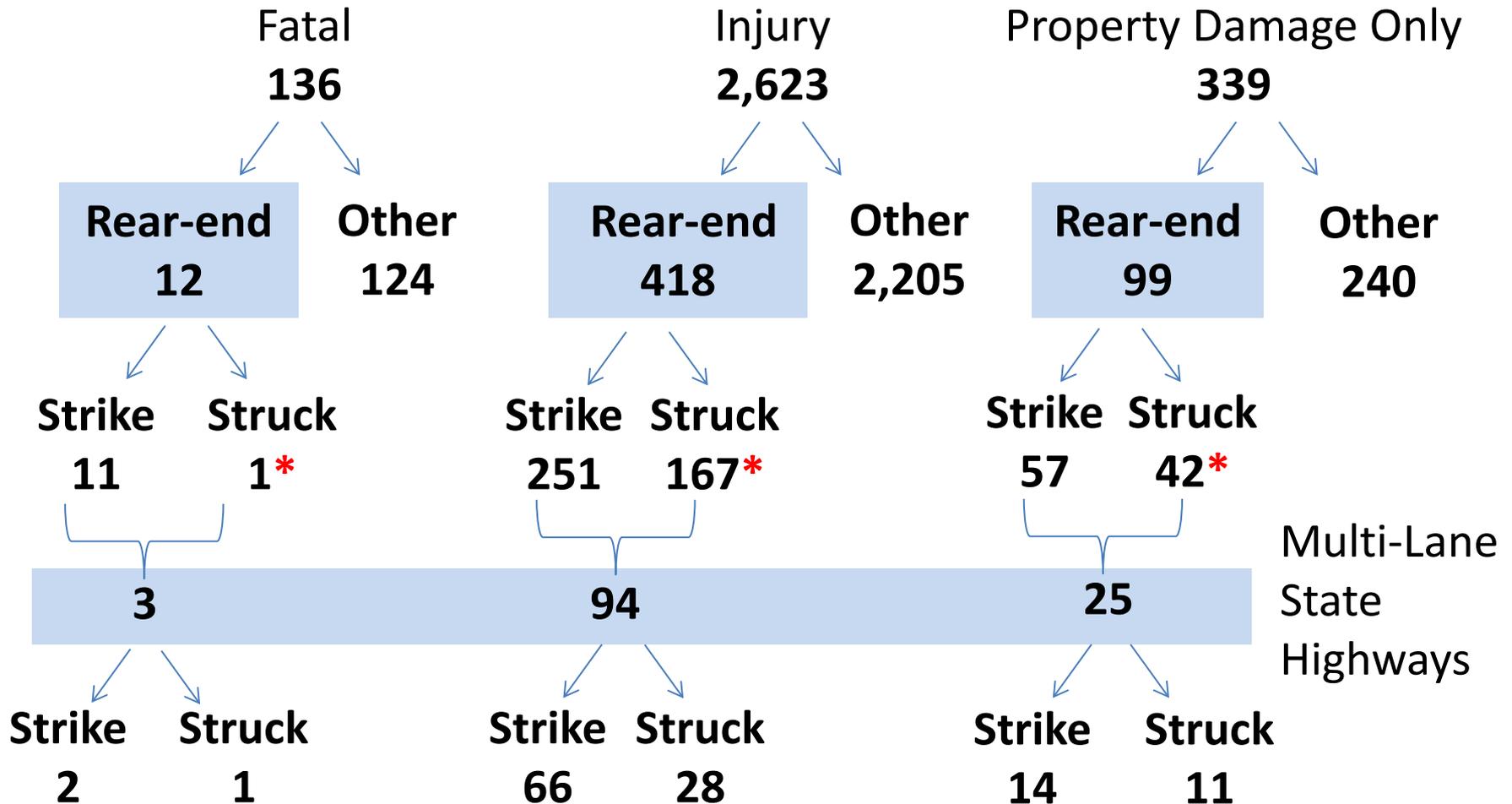
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2013-2015 Motorcycle Crashes – State Level – 3,098



*Includes motorcycles being hit by other motorcycles