

To whom it may concern,

I accidentally group-replied to a friend who also wrote to you, but I wanted to provide my own personal thoughts related to SB 998, Oregon's "Idaho Stop Law for Bicyclists." I support this bill.

Although occasional bicycling has been a hobby of mine off and on since childhood, about three years ago I decided to see if I could use my bicycle as my primary means of transportation. I live out in the country — 7.1 miles from my normal workplace in town — and I never dreamed I would actually be commuting into town by bicycle on a regular basis. Three years ago I began tracking my bicycling miles, and last month I surpassed 10,000 miles on a bicycle since that time.

Anyone who has commuted by bicycle knows that it requires a significant amount of energy to accelerate from a full stop. There's the downshifting to slow down and stop, putting one foot on the ground (usually means lifting oneself off the bicycle seat), then, when it's safe to go, get back on the saddle, clip-in your bike shoes (if applicable), and shift up through the gears as you accelerate back to your normal riding speed. It might not sound like much but try doing that over and over as you ride through residential streets with a stop sign every two or three blocks! When there is obviously no other traffic near the intersection, I actually feel less safe doing the stop/look/re-mount/pedal routine than if I could just proceed through the intersection cautiously without actually stopping.

I try very much to "be visible yet ride invisibly." That is, I wear a bright lime green jacket or vest, and have a bright flashing red rear light on my bike, so that all other road users are likely to see me. But — wherever possible — I try to avoid riding where motor vehicles are driving. I much prefer a bike lane or a wide shoulder to a shoulderless road. Often I have no choice. Like I said, I live in the country. If I want to ride my bike into town, I need to use the country roads, with no bike lane, and often no shoulder at all. Once in town, I prefer side streets through residential areas to busy multi-lane roads. Unfortunately many side streets have frequent stop signs.

I have heard the argument that if this law passes, "crazy bicyclists" will be pulling out in front of cars at intersections. But SB-998 doesn't change the law in that regard. And I for one know that if I ever have an accident with a motor vehicle while on my bike, I lose. As a cyclist, I'm one of the more vulnerable users of the pavement. I know that my life depends on my proceeding through every intersection with the utmost caution.

When I commute during quiet traffic times (quite often), it's frankly maddening to stand over my bike at a red light in a left-turn lane, with no other vehicles around in any direction, and wait, and wait, and wait for the light to turn green. Often it never does, because the sensor in the road doesn't detect my bicycle. I have no choice but to either (1) run the red light, or (2) get off my bike and walk to the corner (illegally since even if there's a crosswalk it usually says "DON'T WALK" and never changes if there are no pedestrians around) so I can push the pedestrian crossing button to force a signal change. That gets old really fast.

As a cyclist, I use hand signals to signal my turns. I always feel less safe on my bike if I'm taking one hand off the handlebars right as (or right before) I'm starting out from a stop. It feels safer if I'm rolling at a "fast walk" speed or faster when taking one hand off my handlebars to signal a turn. Even if I deem it safe to proceed through the intersection, I'll still signal my turn to vehicles that are approaching from a distance so that they know my intent.

I typically average about 13 - 14 MPH on my bike commutes. At intersections, slowing down to roughly half that — the speed of a fast walk or slow jog — to check for traffic is significantly easier than coming to a complete stop.

As I understand SB-998, if it passes, I'll be able to treat a stop sign or a flashing red light as though it's a yield sign, and I'll be able to treat a red light as a stop sign (stop, then proceed only when safe, even if the light is still red). Frankly, this is something many cyclists already do, because the law it is stands today is simply unfriendly to bicyclists, and Oregon is supposed to be bicycle friendly, right? How the heck did a less progressive state like Idaho get this right, several decades before Oregon?!

I urge the passage of this bill. THANK YOU!

Sincerely,

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