

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1625

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to motorcycles at traffic signals.

Brief Description: Regulating motorcycles at traffic control signals.

Sponsors: Representatives DeBolt, Blake, Hinkle, Warnick, Seaquist, Kagi, Kirby, Hunt, Wood, Dickerson, Conway, Lovick, Roach, Chase, Dunn, Flannigan, McCune, Priest, McDermott, Santos, Williams, McDonald, Newhouse, Alexander, Strow, Kretz, Condotta, Roberts, Ormsby, Haigh, Rolfes and Moeller.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/12/07, 3/2/07 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Allows motorcycles to turn left after one cycle at a signalized intersection equipped with a vehicle detection device, if that device fails to register the presence of the vehicle.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 18 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Flannigan, Vice Chair; Jarrett, Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Campbell, Eddy, Erickson, Hailey, Hankins, Lovick, Rodne, Rolfes, Sells, Springer, B. Sullivan, Upthegrove, Wallace and Wood.

Minority Report: Do not pass. Signed by 4 members: Representatives Appleton, Hudgins, Kristiansen and Simpson.

Staff: David Munnecke (786-7315).

Background:

All vehicle operators are required to obey traffic control devices, including traffic signals at intersections. Some of these traffic signals are equipped with sensors that determine when a

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vehicle has approached the intersection. Once the vehicle is detected by the sensor, the traffic signal will initiate a change in, or extension of, a traffic signal phase (e.g., change a red light to green).

The rules governing traffic control devices are prescribed in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and WAC Chapter 468-95.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

After stopping at an intersection controlled by a traffic signal using a vehicle detection device, a motorcyclist may proceed to turn left, after exercising due care, if a full cycle of the traffic signal has passed without the left turn signal operating.

A belief that a traffic signal is equipped with a vehicle detection device, when it is not, is not a defense to a traffic citation for failure to obey a traffic signal. Similarly, a belief that the device is inoperative due to the size of the motorcycle is not a defense when the device is not inoperative.

The ability to turn left after a full cycle of a traffic signal that fails to operate is limited to motorcyclists who meet the current financial responsibility requirements for motor vehicles. A penalty equal to the penalty for failing to provide proof of motor vehicle insurance under RCW 46.30.020(1)(d) is imposed on motorcycle operators who utilize the ability to turn left granted in the act without meeting the same liability insurance and financial responsibility requirements as other motor vehicle drivers.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The circumstances where a motorcyclist may proceed through an intersection after waiting for a full cycle of the traffic signal is limited to left turn signals only.

The ability to turn left after a full cycle of a traffic signal that fails to operate is further limited to motorcyclists who meet the current financial responsibility requirements for motor vehicles. A penalty equal to the penalty for failing to provide proof of motor vehicle insurance under RCW 46.30.020(1)(d) is also imposed on motorcycle operators who utilize the ability to turn left granted after a full cycle of the traffic signal without meeting the same liability insurance and financial responsibility requirements as other motor vehicle drivers.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Not requested.

Effective Date of Substitute Bill: The bill takes effect September 1, 2007.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) This bill came about because of a traffic signal that refused to operate and a passenger that refused to let the driver go through the light anyway. People don't want to turn left through a signal when it is illegal for them to do so, but sometimes that's safer than trying to get out of the left turn lane and get back out into traffic.

Unfortunately, it's fairly common for a signal not to operate for a motorcycle. The triggering devices are designed to operate when a metal object breaks the electric field, but sometimes the motorcycle is not large enough to cause this to occur. The mechanism can be adjusted, but this can only occur after the fact. Tennessee, Idaho, and Minnesota have similar laws to deal with this situation.

(Opposed) Motorcycles always lose when there is a collision, and motorcycle-involved collisions are increasing across the country. A bill such as this will very likely increase the problem. A better way to deal with this issue is to reset the sensors to detect the motorcycles.

This law will be difficult to enforce, since there will be no way to tell if someone has waited a full cycle of the light. Law enforcement would need a mechanism to determine if the light has cycled. Without that, the officer will have to assume that the motorcyclist has broken the law.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative DeBolt, prime sponsor; John Bolin, Washington Road Riders Association; David Preston; Rich Bright and Ginger Magures, ABATE of Washington; and John Eaton, American Motorcycle Association.

(Opposed) Chief Fred Wasler, Sultan Police Department; and Chief John Batiste, Washington State Patrol.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.