

# HOUSE BILL REPORT

## HB 1255

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**As Reported by House Committee On:**  
Transportation

**Title:** An act relating to motorcycle steering equipment requirements.

**Brief Description:** Concerning motorcycle steering equipment requirements.

**Sponsors:** Representatives Orcutt and Sutherland.

**Brief History:**

**Committee Activity:**

Transportation: 2/4/21, 2/22/21 [DP].

**Brief Summary of Bill**

- Exempts a motorcycle driver from the requirement to wear a helmet if the motorcycle is equipped with a steering wheel or handlebars, seat belts meeting federal safety standards, and a partially or completely enclosed seating area which has been federally certified as crush proof.

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### HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

**Majority Report:** Do pass. Signed by 24 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Wylie, 1st Vice Chair; Bronoske, 2nd Vice Chair; Ramos, 2nd Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Eslick, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Robertson, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Volz, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Chapman, Dent, Duerr, Goehner, Griffey, Klicker, Lovick, McCaslin, Orcutt, Paul, Ramel, Riccelli, Sutherland, Taylor, Walsh and Wicks.

**Minority Report:** Do not pass. Signed by 3 members: Representatives Entenman, Slatter and Valdez.

**Minority Report:** Without recommendation. Signed by 2 members: Representatives Berry and Hackney.

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*This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.*

**Staff:** Beth Redfield (786-7140).

**Background:**

Motorcycle drivers are required to wear a helmet when operating the motorcycle on a state highway, county road, or city street. The requirement does not apply if the motorcycle is antique or the motorcycle is equipped with all of the following: a steering wheel, seat belts meeting federal safety standards, and a partially or completely enclosed seating area which has been federally certified as crush proof.

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**Summary of Bill:**

The motorcycle helmet requirement would not apply if a motorcycle is equipped with a steering wheel or handlebars and also meets the requirements regarding safety belts and a crush-proof, enclosed seating area.

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**Appropriation:** None.

**Fiscal Note:** Available.

**Effective Date:** The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.

**Staff Summary of Public Testimony:**

(In support) There used to be only three or four types of vehicles out on the road. With innovation there are different styles of vehicles now that are between one or the other. It is difficult to draw the line between motorcycle and not being a motorcycle, having to wear a helmet and not having to wear a helmet. It should not be a matter of the steering mechanism, but whether it is a vehicle that is safer to operate without a helmet than with a helmet. An example of a vehicle which is actually more dangerous with a helmet being worn is the Arcimoto—a 3-wheel, electric vehicle manufactured in Eugene. It helps fulfill a need for sustainable, affordable transportation that is a pleasure to drive. It has front-wheel drive, a low center of gravity, and provides similar stability to that found in passenger cars. The safety management system consists of: a roll cage meeting federal motor carrier safety roof-crush requirements for protecting occupants in a rollover; a seat belt harness meeting federal requirements for seat belts; and an energy-absorbing zone to lessen impacts in a collision. The vehicle uses handlebars for steering in place of a steering wheel, which saves up to 10 percent or more of the total weight of the vehicle, and provides quicker steering response. Unfortunately, because of having handlebars for steering, it does not qualify for Washington's helmet exemption. All other state requirements have been met or exceeded.

The helmet law creates a dangerous situation. The five-point lap and shoulder belt restraint system holds the torso securely against the seat, but the head, with the helmet adding 30 percent to the weight, can fly violently forward in a collision. The combination of safety restraints and use of helmets can result in severe whiplash or death even at speeds as slow as 30 miles per hour. This will not open a loophole for true motorcycles to qualify for the helmet exemption. It also will not eliminate any current motor vehicle qualifying for exemptions.

(Opposed) None.

**Persons Testifying:** Representative Orcutt, prime sponsor; and Joel Sheltroun, Arcimoto.

**Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying:** None.