

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1403

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to vehicle-activated traffic control signals.

Brief Description: Addressing the detection of motorcycles and bicycles at vehicle-activated traffic control signals.

Sponsors: Representatives Williams, DeBolt, Rolfes, Hinkle, Upthegrove, Blake, Moeller, Newhouse, Takko, Green, Walsh, Short, Haler, Kelley, Hurst, Van De Wege, McCune, Kristiansen, Condotta, Warnick, Hunt, Goodman, Johnson, Simpson and Sullivan.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/5/09, 2/18/09 [DPS].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Requires vehicle-activated traffic control devices to routinely and reliably detect motorcycles and bicycles.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: The substitute bill be substituted therefor and the substitute bill do pass. Signed by 26 members: Representatives Clibborn, Chair; Liias, Vice Chair; Roach, Ranking Minority Member; Rodne, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Armstrong, Campbell, Cox, Driscoll, Eddy, Ericksen, Finn, Flannigan, Herrera, Johnson, Klippert, Kristiansen, Moeller, Rolfes, Sells, Shea, Simpson, Springer, Takko, Wallace, Williams and Wood.

Staff: Christie Parker (786-7322)

Background:

Vehicle-activated traffic control devices cause signals to change when a vehicle is present. Most vehicle detectors are copper wires ("loops") embedded just below the pavement of intersection approaches. The signal controller has electronic equipment that creates a magnetic field above the loop detector. When a vehicle passes over the loop, the change in

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magnetic field is detected and processed by the signal controller. This allows the traffic signal to be operated based on vehicle demand.

These detectors can be adjusted for different vehicle types, including trucks, passenger automobiles, motorcycles, and bicycles. Modifying the sensitivity of the detector adjusts the amount of change in magnetic field necessary for the detector to identify a vehicle. While lower sensitivity can mean that sensors do not detect motorcycles and bicycles, higher sensitivity has the potential to increase false vehicle detection. City, county, and state transportation agencies are responsible for ensuring the loop detectors work.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) owns about 1,040 vehicle-activated traffic control signals, all of which can be adjusted to detect motorcycles and bicycles. The WSDOT does not currently evaluate whether signals reliably detect motorcycles and bicycles as part of its routine maintenance and monitoring of traffic signals. Washington cities are responsible for about 3,734 intersections with vehicle-activated traffic control signals; counties are responsible for about 1,643.

Summary of Substitute Bill:

The substitute bill states the following:

- existing vehicle-activated traffic control signals must be adjusted to detect motorcycles and bicycles, subject to the availability of funds appropriated for this purpose;
- priority for signal adjustment must be given to signals for which detection complaints have been received or have been otherwise identified as a detection problem;
- jurisdictions with vehicle-activated traffic control signals are required to create a procedure for filing detection complaints and must maintain a record of these complaints until all signals within the jurisdiction routinely and reliably detect motorcycles and bicycles;
- vehicle detection areas must be clearly marked on the pavement if the existing detector is anywhere but in the center of a lane and immediately before the stop bar or crosswalk;
- vehicle-activated traffic control signals that are design-complete and placed in operation after enactment must be designed and operated to reliably detect motorcycles and bicycles; and
- replaced and substantially upgraded vehicle-activated traffic control devices must reliably detect motorcycles and bicycles. On arterials and bicycle routes, "substantially" upgraded means that the cost of the upgrade is more than 20 percent of what the cost would be to completely replace the equipment or provide updated equipment that detects bicycles and motorcycles. On other routes, "substantially" upgraded means that the cost is more than 50 percent of what the cost would be to completely replace the equipment or provide updated equipment that detects bicycles and motorcycles.

"Bicycles" are defined as human-powered vehicles with metallic wheels at least 16 inches in diameter or with metallic braking strips and components. "Motorcycles" are defined as

motor vehicles with no more than three wheels ridden by a driver astride the motor or power train and designed to be steered with a handle bar.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill:

The substitute bill makes the following changes: the requirement that all existing signals must be adjusted to detect motorcycles and bicycles within four years is removed; instead, the requirement is subject to availability of funds appropriated. Priority is given to signals for which complaints have been received. The substitute bill requires that jurisdictions establish and publicize a procedure for filing and responding to these complaints. The substitute bill changes the threshold for "substantially" upgraded signals on arterials and bicycle routes to 20 percent of what the cost would be to completely replace or provide updated equipment rather than 15 percent of the cost. The substitute bill clarifies that pavement markings must be indicated at existing signals.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

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

Staff Summary of Public Testimony:

(In support) Lights that do not change when a motorcycle or bicycle is present can be very frustrating and dangerous. Please support this bill and make public roadways equitable for all. If signals do not change, cyclists are put in the position of having to break the law. The bill proposes a long-term solution to this problem. The four-year time frame was intended to be generous and allow jurisdictions sufficient time to implement the new rule. We recognize that the proposal will cost a lot of money and we are willing to work with the WSDOT, cities, and counties to explore solutions.

(In support with concerns) The bill requires that all of these devices reliably detect motorcycles within four years, which means that personnel must go out and test all of the devices. This will cost \$1,500 per signal. It would be helpful if motorcycle and bicycle enthusiasts would help identify signals that need adjustment and thus reduce the need to check every signal.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: (In support) Representative Williams, prime sponsor; Brian Faller, Bike Alliance; Larry Walker, Washington Road Riders Association; and Donnie Landsman and Mick Gillispie, American Bikers Aimed Towards Education of Washington.

(In support with concerns) Ted Trepanier, Washington State Department of Transportation; and Ashley Probart, Association of Washington Cities.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.