

HB920 Motor Vehicles – Motorcycles – Overtaking and Passing Vehicles

Written Testimony in favor of the Bill

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Good afternoon members of the House Environment and Transportation Committee. My name is Paul Thorn and I am a lifelong motorcycle rider. I have been riding motorcycles for over forty years. Nine of those years I lived and rode my motorcycle throughout Europe. I tour the Eastern United States every summer and I must state that I do split lanes whenever I need to and whenever my safety and the safety of others is jeopardized.

I am submitting this written testimony to say that I am in favor of House Bill 920 and that I would hope that this committee would also be in favor of this bill.

Please let me explain my reasoning for the support of this bill to those members of the committee that may be non-riders. As I am sure there will be testimony citing surveys that extol the benefits of “lane splitting” and “lane filtering”, not only for the motorcyclists but for all motorists, I would like to tender some of my personal knowledge and experiences of riding in traffic.

We all know the traffic situations that exists on the highways and interstates around Baltimore, Frederick, Annapolis, the Bay Bridge and the Harry Nice Bridge and on Rt. 235, around the Patuxent River Naval Air Station in St. Mary’s County, where I currently live. Everyone here has been stuck in traffic jams at one time or another and the situation in these areas is not improving. While most people are sitting in their air-conditioned automobiles inching forward, I am on my motorcycle sitting in the hot sun. I am wearing jeans, a leather jacket and a helmet. I am trying to cope with high temperatures from the weather and my motorcycle’s engine. As I sit on the blacktop, the sun’s heat is reflected onto me. This heat, along with my engine heat and automobile exhaust take a toll on me. I need some relief but I sit in the lane until I cannot sit any longer.

Another situation that eventually convinces me to split lanes or to ride the shoulder is that while the engine heats up, the oil thins out and this situation requires me to use more throttle to make the bike move. The clutch heats up and this makes it trickier to engage the clutch to move the bike. No matter how strong my clutch hand is, my hand will start to fail as well. My hand will get tired, the clutch will get heavy and hard to pull in. Two conditions may now happen at this point. While the hot motorcycle may not respond properly to throttle input, the bike may lurch forward causing me to jump quickly and then to brake quickly. The motorcycle is also much more prone to stalling and may be hard to start after stalling. I believe that most people, and that the members of this committee, do not want a motorcyclist that may be suffering possible heat-exhaustion, operating a heat-affected motorcycle, with diminished performance in his clutch hand, operating in heavy, bumper-to-bumper traffic.

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So, I split lanes. I use the shoulder as well but as you know, the road trash and debris gather on the shoulders and I don't want to risk a flat tire. I have never felt unsafe while lane splitting. I have never encountered an automobile driver cutting me off just to prove a point. An argument I hear from some motorcyclists is that automobile drivers will get jealous, self-righteous or even offended by the bike "cheating the traffic jam" and cut off the motorcycle just to prove a point. This has not happened to me.

Another argument I hear, and one that I deem just totally ridiculous, is that with those issues, I don't have to ride a motorcycle. I can drive a car like most everyone else. I simply say that I choose to ride a motorcycle the same as you choose to drive the type of vehicle you drive. I ride every almost every day and will continue to ride my motorcycle for as long as my health allows.

This issue is not about allowing motorcyclists special privileges, this is about relieving congestion on our roads, the safety of our motorcyclists and, as I am sure you will learn, it is about less vehicles idling in traffic and adding toxic gasses to the environment. This practice of lane splitting is supported by the California Highway Patrol, is not necessarily illegal in other states and a practice that should be supported by, and legal in the state of Maryland.

I am a fifty-eight-year-old motorcyclist and I have been riding motorcycles since I was sixteen years old. I am in favor of House Bill 920 and I hope that this committee also finds in favor of this bill.

Thank you.

Paul Salvatore Thorn