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news

Clarifying Passing Cyclists

SB 895 WILL COME INTO EFFECT ON JAN. 1, 2024, WHICH ALLOWS FOR SAFER TRAVELING CONDITIONS FOR CYCLISTS

By Josiah Pensado

On May 31, 2006, cyclist Jane Higdon was hit by a logging truck and killed on Territorial Highway south of Eugene when the trucker believed that he was obeying the no passing zone on the road.

Rep. Tom Andersen (D-South Salem), who was Higdon's friend, has long been a champion of bicycle safety. On March 8, Senate Bill 895 had its first public hearing in the Senate. "As an active bicyclist, I see firsthand that if we are not careful and clear in laws regulating speeds and passing zones in Oregon, lives are put in jeopardy," Andersen says in a press release announcing the bill's passage in May.

SB 895 clarifies that motorists can and should provide more space to all slow-moving vehicles, including cyclists, when passing.

The purpose of SB 895 is to clear up any confusion as to when a vehicle can pass a bicycle or any slow moving vehicle when a double yellow line is present. SB 895 will add two new additions to Oregon law, the first being that obstructions can be passed on a double yellow line, just as long as you drive five miles per hour under the posted speed limit. The second being an amendment clarifying what an "obstruction" is. It now includes a person riding a bicycle or any other vehicle traveling less than one half the posted speed limit.

Richard Hughes, who proposed SB 895 to the Legislature says, "It was unanimous in both the Senate and the House of Representatives and went through and even with the Republican walkout, we didn't have a problem." It passed in the Senate 29-0 and in the House of Representatives 54-0.

According to Michal Young, an associate professor of computer science at the University of Oregon and active cyclist, most interactions he has with cars are courteous and drivers want you to be safe but don't necessarily know that it is OK to pass. Mix this with the fact that rural roads do not have the widest shoulder for cyclists, and it can lead to mixed reactions from drivers.

So while SB 895 moved forward into law rather painlessly, its trouble lies in ensuring that the public knows about it. Long time cyclists advocate Sue Wolling says that raising awareness to this new law is the main challenge this law presents. "I think more than anything it's just trying to create a little more awareness," she says, adding that she hopes that speaking to the press will help raise awareness of SB 895.

Higdon was riding with three other cyclists on Territorial Road when one rider fell into a ditch as the logging truck passed too closely. Higdon was struck by the rear wheels of the truck. Higdon was an avid cyclist and held degrees in exercise physiology as well as a doctorate in nutrition.

Gov. Tina Kotek signed the bill into law on June 7, and it will become effective on Jan. 1, 2024. Sen. Floyd Prozanski (D-Eugene) was a chief sponsor of SB 895. ■

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