

HOUSE BILL REPORT

HB 1614

As Reported by House Committee On:
Transportation

Title: An act relating to the traffic lane merge zipper method.

Brief Description: Requiring certain traffic lane merge education and testing.

Sponsors: Representatives Young and Gildon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Transportation: 2/20/19, 2/27/19 [DP].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires driver education courses to include in their curriculum instruction on the late-merge zipper method, which consists of drivers using both lanes of traffic until reaching the defined merge area and then alternating in "zipper" fashion into the single lane.
- Mandates testing of the late-merge zipper method in the written portion of the driving exam.
- Requires the Department of Licensing to provide an instructional poster, video, tutorial, or document with information on the late-merge zipper method to all driver's license renewal applicants who request a renewal at a driver licensing office.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 30 members: Representatives Fey, Chair; Slatter, 2nd Vice Chair; Valdez, 2nd Vice Chair; Wylie, 1st Vice Chair; Barkis, Ranking Minority Member; Walsh, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Young, Assistant Ranking Minority Member; Boehnke, Chambers, Chapman, Dent, Doglio, Dufault, Entenman, Eslick, Goehner, Gregerson, Irwin, Kloba, Lovick, McCaslin, Mead, Orcutt, Ortiz-Self, Paul, Pellicciotti, Ramos, Riccelli, Shea and Van Werven.

Staff: Jennifer Harris (786-7143).

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

Background:

Vehicles Yielding to Other Vehicles.

The driver of a vehicle approaching a yield sign must slow down to a speed reasonable for the existing conditions and, if required for safety, to stop. After slowing or stopping, the driver must yield the right-of-way to any vehicle in the intersection or approaching on another roadway so closely that it constitutes an immediate hazard.

There is no right-of-way preference in law for merging lanes without a yield or stop sign, nor is a merging rule specified for freeway acceleration lanes and ramps without a posted yield sign.

Driver Training.

To be eligible to obtain an Intermediate Driver's License, an individual between the ages of 16 and 18 must have passed a driver training course.

The Department of Licensing (DOL) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) are required to jointly develop and maintain a required curriculum for driver training that must include information on the safe, lawful, and responsible operation of motor vehicles; intermediate driver's license issuance; passenger and driving restrictions and sanctions for violating these restrictions; the effect of traffic violations and collisions on driving privileges; the effects of alcohol and drug use on motor vehicle operators; motorcycle awareness; bicycle safety; and pedestrian safety.

Instructional material used in driver training schools must include information on the proper use of the left-hand lane by motor vehicles on multilane highways, bicyclists' and pedestrians' rights and responsibilities, and suggested riding procedures in common traffic situations.

Driver's License Examination and Renewal.

To obtain a driver's license, an individual must pass a driver licensing examination. The driver's licensing examination includes a written test of the applicant's knowledge of traffic laws and ability to understand and follow the laws that regulate traffic.

A driver's license expires on the sixth anniversary of the licensee's birthdate following the issuance of the license. A driver's license must be renewed to remain valid and renewal applicants are required to apply for a renewal in person at a DOL office every other renewal.

Summary of Bill:

The required curriculum for driver training and instructional materials in driver training schools must include information on the late-merge zipper method, to be applied when two

lanes are merging. The method consists of drivers using both lanes of traffic until reaching the defined merge area and then alternating in "zipper" fashion into the single lane.

Testing of the late-merge zipper method must be included in the written portion of the driving exam and requires the DOL to provide an instructional poster, video, tutorial, or document with information on the late-merge zipper method to all driver's license renewal applicants who request a renewal at a driver licensing office.

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) This is a matter of safety. Many people do not know how to merge correctly and want to merge too soon. Others do not want to let vehicles merge into their lane. This bill would improve traffic congestion and safety.

At an interchange toward State Route (SR) 302, the Washington State Department of Transportation allows for shoulder merging due to heavy congestion during traffic commute hours. Traffic backs up onto SR 16 at this location and this results in stalled traffic. However, people have not been able to use the shoulder effectively because those using it have been viewed by others as lane cutters. This has resulted in an increased likelihood of getting rear ended. Education on merging may also be beneficial to the SR 99 tunnel's two-lane configuration.

(Opposed) None.

Persons Testifying: Representative Young, prime sponsor.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: None.