



September 19, 2016

Dear Senate Judiciary Committee:

The Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition is pleased to support the bicycle safety package before this committee. I strongly urge you to vote in favor SB1029, SB1030, SB1076, SB1077, and SB1078. Collectively, these bills protect vulnerable roadway users, create clear standards for how to safely pass a bicyclist, and improve driver's education in Michigan to put a great emphasis on bicycle safety.

The Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition advocates for a more bicycle friendly community that provides opportunities for safe riding conditions to all user groups. Our members are disabled and senior bicyclists, bicycle commuters, mountain bikers, bicycle club members, bicycle trail supporters, road, cyclocross and BMX racers, as well as health and environmental advocates who are working toward a healthier community.

The 57% increase in bicycling fatalities in Michigan in 2015 is shocking. 2016 looks to be more tragic in the wake of a summer with numerous car/bike crashes and 18 fatalities at the end of August. As cities create infrastructure to support safe cycling, support of these bills becomes critical to prevent future senseless tragedies.

That starts by improving driver's education. Michigan does not spend adequate time teaching new drivers about bicyclist's rights and how to safely share the road. As Complete Streets policies continue to grow in popularity, more and more bicycle lanes and other dedicated bicycle infrastructure are being installed in communities across Michigan. This makes it more important than ever to educate drivers on how to safely interact with cyclists on our changing roads. Failing to include bicycle safety in Michigan's driver's education curriculum endangers the lives of all roadway users. Dedicating a specific amount of time will help to alleviate confusion among motorists and reduce common crashes.

One of the most common types of bicycle/auto crashes involve collisions where a motor vehicle strikes a bicyclist while attempting to pass when traveling in the same direction. The Office of Highway Safety and Planning reports that 55% of bicyclists involved in crashes in 2015 were "going straight ahead" prior to the crash. Creating clearer guidelines for how motorists should interact with cyclists on the roads is essential. A five foot passing standard is the minimum distance sufficient to ensure safe passing and to help prevent a driver from striking a cyclist if the cyclist were to fall in the travel lane. Michigan is one of only eleven states without a law specifically requiring motorists to pass bicyclists safely.

Lastly, Michigan law already has enhanced penalties for drivers who injure or kill construction workers, children in designated school zones, and operators of slow-moving farm vehicles. It is time to recognize bicyclists, pedestrians, and wheelchair users as inherently vulnerable roadway users and give them similar protections. Pedestrians and bicyclists made up 21% of all roadway fatalities in 2015, a disproportionately high number considering they only accounted for 1.42% of all traffic crashes. Enhanced penalties will further increase the standard of care for drivers around non-motorized roadway users.

The Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition is very encouraged at the extensive public support for these bills and the wide bipartisan support among the legislature. Thank you in advance for your leadership in supporting these common sense bills.

Sincerely,

Donna Messina  
Chairperson  
Greater Grand Rapids Bicycle Coalition