

Marble Floor Marathon, Continued

Our weight fee bill ([SB 5309](#)), being carried by Sen. Cortes (D-18) with Sen. MacEwen (R-35) as second seat, did not clear committee cutoff. As I said last month, we had a good hearing in Senate Transportation, and I want to give kudos to all hands for signing up in favor but not wishing to testify. Chad Magendanz was an excellent partner at the table, we left time on the clock during testimony, and the committee did not give us a bunch of push back. Unfortunately, right after that a huge monkey wrench was tossed into the works.

There were serious indications that the already appropriated federal funds were at serious risk, thereby exacerbating the already pressing budget issues.

There are some wicked moving parts in the equation because money is involved. With the churn of the potential withholding of already budgeted federal dollars, coupled with the fact that the feds are operating on a Continuing Resolution in lieu of a proper budget bill, things are in a bit of a tizzy in Olympia. The transportation, operating, and capital budgets are tied to federal dollars.

The good news/bad news item remains that, even if we do not get the bill out of committee before cutoff, the issue can be tied to the transportation budget, which can keep the issue in play until about 5 days from the end of session. Items to implement the budget get special dispensation in the time schedule. Budget implementation items can extend out to past 20 April. Session ends on 27 April.

The good news for the supporters of the fee reduction issue is that there is still support for setting up a separate weight class for motorcycles. There is no guarantee that will happen, and I cannot see inside the negotiations. I do not have much confidence that our fees, or any for that matter, will be going down this year. I am keeping in touch with the rank and file of the Senate Transportation Committee, and I have had one very productive and cordial meeting with Senator Lias, the Chair, in the wings of the Senate floor. While he did indicate his support for setting up the new weight class for motorcycles, he assured me that everything is still written on an Etch-a-Sketch this early in the game.

The “bad” news is that I will have to be actively engaged in the process right up to the bitter end.

What riders can do is reach out to your senator and reps. The message is asking them to support the spirit of the weight fee bill by setting up a separate weight class for vehicles registered as motorcycles. Also ask that they do not let anyone try to redirect or “borrow” funds from our dedicated Motorcycle Safety Account.

Lane sharing did not get dropped, but with the fiscal churn that is going on, that is to be expected. I will be researching opportunities to get the stakeholders to the table during the interim to begin a civil conversation, the goal being to work on some sort of language and method to make some sort of sharing or filtering work.

Other things on my radar:

1. [SSB 5328](#) which makes going 30 MPH over the posted speed limit reckless driving, with a \$5,000 fine, at least a 30 day license suspension, and possibly a 364 day jail sentence. I include this as a caution for all of you who seem to think that the posted speed limits are “advisory.” The bill has passed the Senate.
2. [SB 5215](#) concerning covered loads (sand, dirt, gravel, etc.). It tightens the regulations but is not really a sea change to policy. It has passed the Senate and is in House Transportation. At this writing there is no hearing scheduled.
3. [HB 1921](#) concerning phased in pay by the mile fees as an offset for decreasing gas tax revenues. This is ostensibly a way to offset the loss of revenue due to the increase in electric and hybrid vehicles. I have been approached by concerned riders who feel that this would increase the tax burden on motorcycles by lumping them in with much less fuel efficient vehicles. There is also the question as to how this would affect the NOVA funds, which come from gas tax revenues to support OHV operations. Conversations are being had behind the scenes at this time. Someone could stretch and try to roll this in with the Transportation budget, but the complexity of implementation makes that highly unlikely.

There are a lot of other “traffic safety” bills, etc. that are getting air play in parts of the media, but most are showing no discernable traction. I will keep an eye out, but feel free to hit me up if you have concerns.

Until next time, ride safely and legislate well.

“Texas” Larry