

SUBJECT: Requiring loop detectors to register the presence of a motorcycle

COMMITTEE: Transportation — committee substitute recommended

VOTE: 9 ayes — Krusee, Phillips, Harper-Brown, Deshotel, Haggerty, Harless, Hill, Macias, Murphy

0 nays

WITNESSES: For — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Jenifer L. Edgett, Texas Motorcycle Rights Association)

Against — None

On — (*Registered, but did not testify*: Darilynn (Dee) McClure, Texas Motorcycle Rights Association; Steve Simmons, Texas Department of Transportation)

BACKGROUND: Inductive loop detectors embedded in pavements are among the most widely deployed tools for monitoring traffic on highway networks. A typical loop detector consists of a solenoid loop of wire buried about two inches below the surface of the pavement. When a vehicle passes through the detector's magnetic field, its metal structure causes a disturbance in the electrical inductance of the loop. This technology is currently applied at traffic intersections to detect the presence of a vehicle and cycle traffic lights from red to green.

DIGEST: CSHB 1279 would require all traffic loop detectors installed at intersections be able to detect motorcycles, in addition to other types of vehicles. This bill would apply only to newly installed loop detectors and existing loop detectors that currently can be calibrated to detect motorcycles.

The bill would take effect September 1, 2007.

SUPPORTERS SAY: CSHB 1279 would alleviate an avoidable frustration for motorcyclists across the state. Many drivers have had the experience of waiting endlessly for a signal to change to green. This is particularly the case for

motorcyclists, who often wait at quiet intersections because the loop detectors are not calibrated to be sensitive enough to detect their presence. Much of this waiting could be avoided if all traffic-signal control systems capable of detecting motorcycles were set to do so. While this may seem like a simple frustration affecting only motorcyclists, these idling vehicles also contribute to regional air pollution.

The bill would provide motorcyclists with the legal support to ensure action at the local level. Modern loop detectors are sensitive enough to detect motorcycles if they are properly installed and maintained. Because the state does not currently require loop detectors to be calibrated to detect motorcycles, sensitivity settings differ from one place to another. While some municipalities set detectors sensitive to bicycles, others may be set only to recognize trucks. This bill would codify a minimum performance standard for public works officials across the state.

CSHB 1279 would not present a financial burden because it would not force localities to replace existing infrastructure. Instead, it would require existing loop detectors that were capable of detecting a motorcycle to be calibrated to do so. This could be done with the support of existing public works personnel. In addition, should a locality repair an intersection surface and, at that time, replace its existing loop detectors with newer equipment, the detectors would have to be capable of detecting motorcycles and calibrated to do so. Further, the bill would not set a fine for non-compliance. Rather, it would compel local officials to ensure their equipment was working optimally.

**OPPONENTS
SAY:**

CSHB 1279 would be an unfunded mandate for local governments. According to TxDOT, the cost of adjusting an older loop detector ranges from \$800 to \$1,500 per device. Given that most intersections have four loop detectors, this bill would cost localities \$3,200 to \$6,000 per intersection. Further, once a loop detector is calibrated, it can malfunction or become less sensitive due to freight traffic, public works projects near an intersection, or weather conditions. At that time, the locality would be required to calibrate the detectors yet again, making this bill not just a one-time cost, but an ongoing expense to ensure loop detectors remained at their most sensitive settings. While the state would not be presented with a fiscal impact, local governments would be stuck footing the bill year after year.

OTHER
OPPONENTS
SAY:

While this bill would suggest localities calibrate loop detectors to be sensitive to motorcyclists, it would include no penalty for non-compliance.

NOTES:

The committee substitute included all traffic-actuated lights and would apply to current and new detectors that are capable of detecting motorcycles.