

Motorcyclists oppose proposed law changes

Death panel prompted proposals

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Proposed changes to motorcycle licensing laws are a good step to improving rider safety but some recommendations by the B.C. Coroners Service don't quite hit the mark, says a provincial motorcycling association.

The proposed changes stemmed from a B.C. Coroners Service death panel review of motorcycle deaths that studied fatal motorcycle accidents and how to reduce deaths.

No blood alcohol content and mandatory industry certification for all motorcycle helmets are no-brainers, but others such as implementing a graduated licensing program for new riders and improving training standards don't address specific problems, said Adele Tompkins, executive director for the Surrey-based B.C. Coalition of Motorcyclists.

"Rather than have a knee-jerk reaction to motorcycle deaths, we need to take a look at the broader picture."

Any kind of training is good, but mandatory training would overwhelm motorcycle schools because there are too few to cope with the sheer numbers of people interested in a motorcycle, or class 6, licence, she said.

If there were incentives like lower insurance rates or reduced probationary time with the novice motorcycle licence, new riders would seek out training, Tompkins said.

One of the main causes of motorcycle deaths are collisions with other vehicles, but in a majority of those cases, the other driver is at fault, she added.

More training about motorcycle awareness for drivers would go a long way to improving road safety, said Tompkins.

"Having a motorcycle awareness month isn't enough."

Attitude goes a long way to rider safety which can be developed through training, said a motorcycle instructor with Action Motorcycle School in Langley.

"We try to convey that if you ride like an idiot, you're going to die like an idiot," said Chris Daigle, who has 20 years of riding experience.

Class 5 licensed drivers can get their class 6 motorcycle license with just a knowledge test and a 30 day waiting period to be eligible for a skills test, according to ICBC.

A proposal to have a skills test first would make no sense because if someone doesn't have their motorcycle license, there would be no legal way to practise out on the road, said Daigle.

Motorcycle ridership has doubled over the last decade from 40,000 to 80,000, and a large chunk of the new riders are baby boomers who are retiring and getting onto motorcycles, according to Daigle.

Between 40 to 50 per cent of riders don't have a full licence, just the learners permit which can be renewed at the end of every year, and stronger law enforcement is needed to curb that behavior, he said.

"But there has to be a fine line because if there are too many restrictions, people won't get a license and ride anyway."

Car drivers need to be more aware of the vulnerabilities of motorcyclists, said Daryl Brown, a lawyer who specializes in motorcycle litigation in Metro Vancouver.

The class 5 graduated licence is a good place to insert more motorcycle awareness training because it targets young drivers, he added.

Another area that needs attention is better statistics from ICBC to get more crash data of motorcycle accidents and fatalities, Brown said.

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