



MIC Position Paper on Lane Splitting July 2014

Lane splitting (also called "lane sharing") refers to the technique of riding a motorcycle between two adjacent lanes of traffic heading in the same direction. As of December 2012, California is the only state in which lane splitting is not illegal. Many California motorcyclists embrace the technique because it gives them the option to pass slow-moving or stopped traffic, whether on a highway or multi-lane city street, and other motorists may appreciate the reduced congestion since the motorcyclist is not taking up space with an automobile in the traffic lanes.

Critics of the technique cite the possibility of a car changing lanes, cutting off the motorcyclist and causing a collision. However, most riders will only split lanes when traffic is moving slowly, limiting the speed at which a driver can make a lateral move and giving the rider ample opportunity to avoid a collision. Some studies suggest (for example, "Motorcycle Lane Splitting on California Freeways," James V. Ouellet, 2011) that lane splitting is no more hazardous than maintaining a normal lane position, because a car driver might sideswipe a motorcyclist or cross the motorcyclist's path whether the rider is situated within a lane or between lanes. The Ouellet study also cites Los Angeles and European research in suggesting that lane splitting may even be safer, since motorcyclists are less likely to be rear-ended in stop-and-go traffic while splitting than while in a normal lane position.

Other potential benefits include an increase in conspicuity since the motorcyclist is moving relative to other traffic; a reduction in motorcyclist fatigue from constant shifting and braking in traffic, since the vast majority of motorcycles have a manual transmission; a reduction in the motorcyclist's exposure to ambient heat in the summer and car exhaust year-round; and a reduction of engine damage from extended idling, especially for models with air-cooled engines.

Riders can manage the risks of lane splitting by being extra cautious and alert and following a few common-sense guidelines:

1. Only split between the two left-most traffic lanes. This consistency of location helps car drivers in those lanes learn to expect motorcyclists.
2. Only split when there is ample space between the lines of cars.
3. Do not split lanes when traffic is at or near the speed limit. The goal of splitting lanes is to keep moving at a reasonable speed through slow or stopped traffic, not to pass cars that are already moving at reasonable speeds.

4. Do not ride substantially faster than the adjacent lines of cars, and never exceed the speed limit. To minimize risk, the speed differential between the motorcyclist and surrounding traffic should be kept to a reasonable level.
5. Use the carpool lane (if present) instead of splitting lanes, if the traffic in the carpool lane is flowing freely. The limited-access nature of carpool lanes generally makes this a safer choice for motorcyclists. It is legal throughout the U.S. for a solo motorcyclist to use carpool lanes.
6. You can share the carpool lane (if present) with other vehicles, but be alert for cars crossing your path at entry and exit points.
7. Avoid riding on the double yellow line and never cross the double yellow line that separates the carpool lane from regular traffic lanes.

The Motorcycle Industry Council believes that lane splitting should be performed only by experienced riders. The best assessment strategy for a motorcyclist to use in all situations is what the Motorcycle Safety Foundation recommends – SEE: Search, Evaluate, Execute. This strategy helps riders minimize risk by detecting and avoiding potentially hazardous traffic situations, managing time and space cushions, and identifying escape paths. Some riders also use the strategy of assuming they're invisible to other motorists, because other motorists may not be on the lookout for motorcycles.

In full consideration of the risks and benefits of lane splitting, the Motorcycle Industry Council supports state laws that allow lane splitting under reasonable restrictions.