

Bicycles and Motorcycles: Report a Problem

This spring, the Ohio Department of Transportation is kicking off a new program that will give the riding community a greater voice in transportation matters and better avenues to express their concerns.

Bicycle and motorcycle riders can now contact an ODOT advocate to report problems with traffic signals and roadway conditions throughout Ohio. ODOT is also establishing new standards that will eventually change the way signals detect vehicles, including motorcycles and bikes.

The Problem

Traditional signal detection uses loops or electrical wires in the pavement that trigger a signal to change when it detects metal at an intersection. Because bicycles and motorcycles have far less metal than cars and trucks, some traffic signals fail to detect riders. And, if a signal won't work, riders are forced to wait for another vehicle or continue through an intersection illegally on a red light.

In addition, traditional loops have hot and cold spots that are difficult for riders to trigger. If a bicycle or motorcycle stops in the middle of a loop, the signal won't recognize the rider. If the bicycle or motorcycle stops on top of the loop, it may trigger the signal, but only if the rider knows where the loop is located.



Contact ODOT

Bicycle and motorcycle riders will be able to contact a representative at ODOT to report these problems. Riders can contact the department via phone or e-mail at:

bike.report@dot.state.oh.us

(614) 387- 0722

Although ODOT maintains only 25 percent of the state's signals, the department will take the lead in working with local governments to resolve signal concerns. ODOT will also maintain a database of the signals experiencing problems, so riders can track the responsiveness of each agency. The database can serve as documentation for riders who have been ticketed for a red-light running offense.

Making the Signals Work

Making signals work for all Ohioans requires addressing old and new signal technology.

In the spring, ODOT will publish new standards that will require all new signals or upgraded signals to use video detection or new loop designs that will detect bicycles and motorcycles. Any signal being installed or upgraded with state and federal funds will be required to use the new standard design. In addition, most local governments adopt ODOT standards regardless of funding source.



For those signals that will not be replaced or upgraded, ODOT has developed changes that can be made in the field to increase a signal's sensitivity for detecting metal. The department conducted several field trials last year that proved the modifications can work.

The down side is that some signals may become so sensitive that they produce false calls to the signal by detecting traffic in the opposite direction. In those cases, ODOT and local governments may opt for other treatments. Some problems may be solved by placing pavement markings or signs to instruct riders where to stop at an intersection. Other locations may require an equipment

upgrade.

Addressing Roadway Surfaces

Roadway surfaces are also an issue for many riders. While crack sealant, milled pavement, loose gravel and steel plates may be easy to navigate for cars and trucks, these roadway surfaces can pose serious challenges for bicycle and motorcycle riders.

In 2009, ODOT will be working on new training materials that educate roadway workers regarding rider concerns. In some cases, the solution may be as simple as making construction, maintenance and utility crews aware of the issues so they can use different materials, less material or better warning signs to alert riders to the conditions ahead.

Other issues, such as pavement markings, will be harder to address.

Today, most freeway pavement markings are made of thermoplastic material because it's durable, highly reflective and cost-effective. But many riders complain that the material can be slick, especially when the pavement is wet.

Until a good alternative is developed, ODOT has agreed to phase out most pavement markings located in the middle of travel lanes to reduce the amount of thermoplastic material that riders are exposed to. One day soon, ODOT hopes that new technology and materials will be developed to fully address the concern.

If you would like to report a problem with roadway conditions, contact: michelle.may@dot.state.oh.us

ODOT will forward your concern to the appropriate district office or responsible local entity for response and resolution.