

Representative Jesse MachLachlan
35th General Assembly District
State of Connecticut

February 10, 2015

Proposed Bill No. 502
Proposal to Amend CGS 14-286b(a)
An Act Concerning Bicycle Safety and Transportation Options

Dear Representative MachLachlan:

I am writing to you in support of Proposed Bill No. 502 and urge you to vote in favor of this proposed revision to the Connecticut General Statutes Section 14-286b(a).

I am a 3 ½ season bicycle commuter, and have been commuting in earnest since 2012, and for several years before then but not as intensely. My round trip commute is approximately 22 miles, between Killingworth and Chester. I have had direct experience with the portion of the current statute as it relates to riding “as near to the right side of the road as practicable” and would like to share this with you. I have found that while the current legislation with respect to the position of bicycles on a roadway appears functional when read, it is too ambiguous in practice.

I commute to work in a velomobile (pictured below); a fully faired recumbent tricycle.



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Propulsion is 100% muscular powered and thus Connecticut State law classifies this vehicle as a bicycle. While this may be a rare and unusual vehicle for Connecticut, the experiences I will describe are common to two-wheeled bicyclists as well.

In the last three years, I have been stopped approximately 6 times by State and local police. Typically, once they realize the velomobile is human powered, they have no further concerns with respect to the law. On at least two of these occasions however, it was suggested to me to “keep to the right” while riding. While this suggestion represents a lack of understanding of bicycle law, I do understand how law enforcement personnel might not understand the term “practicable” in the current law vs. the term “possible”, which term is not part of the current law.

My commute is along roadways with speed limits of anywhere from 25 mph to 45 mph. Depending upon grade and other factors, I can sustain 25 mph to 35 mph. At or very near the speed limit in particular, I ride in the lane because as a bicycle operator I deem that to be as far to the right as “practicable” for my own safety. In remote instances, while traveling in the lane I have been “tailgated” by motor vehicle operators for reasons unknown to me. Perhaps they did not believe I belonged in the lane.

Although I do not ride in the shoulder or to the right side of a travel lane when traveling at the normal speed of traffic, I will do so when I am traveling less than the normal speed of traffic. At the normal speed of traffic however, this position is too close to the edge of the road and substantially reduces any margin for error.

I typically take high definition video as I ride. I have several photos of close passes by motor vehicle operators when I ride in the shoulder or to the right side of the travel lane. In one such instance, the State police visited a particular motorist, on my behalf, who claimed she did not realize what she was doing. Her reaction demonstrates the term “marginalized” - when a bicyclist rides in the shoulder or at the right side of the lane and motor vehicle operators “do not see them” – an extremely dangerous combination for the bicyclist.

While it may sound counterintuitive to some, particularly non-bicyclists, riding in the lane is far safer than always riding to the right. In the lane is where motor vehicle operators are looking, not at “margins” of the road. I can do this now under the current law because I deem it to be as far to the right as practicable for my own safety. But the term “practicable” is too ambiguous in practice, as demonstrated by my interactions with some police and some motorists, for instance.

I believe that riding in the travel lane when traveling “at the normal speed of traffic”, and doing so being protected under the proposed revision to CGS 14-286b(a), will help to clearly define the rights of bicyclists to use public roadways and help further their respect by motorists as a legitimate roadway user. This legislation is important in helping to promote bicycling as a safe and serious mode of transportation. If Connecticut is to truly move forward with sustainable modes of transportation that have added environmental and health benefits, it is legislation like Proposed Bill No. 502 that our State so profoundly needs to help us get there.

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Please support Proposed Bill No. 502 and vote in favor of the proposed revision to the Connecticut General Statutes Section 14-286b(a).

Thank you.

Sincerely,

J. Howard Pfrommer
17 Dudley Towne Road
Killingworth, CT 06419

cc: Bike Walk Connecticut