Same Roads, Same Rights, Same Rules again

In a May 26 letter entitled, Want the rights? Pay for responsibilities, Dennis Bolyard stated that bicyclists would have the same rights as motorists when they pay for license plates, pay property taxes on their vehicles and carry the minimum insurance that the law requires motorists to pay.

Mr. Bolyard seemed to overlook the fact that cyclists already have the same rights as motorists. WV 17C-11-2 and Morgantown 373.02(a) both grant cyclists the same rights as motorists and subjects cyclists to the same duties. That fact was reported in the column entitled Same Road, Same Rights, Same Rules published May 20 in the Dominion Post and to which Mr. Bolyard was responding.

The Morgantown Municipal Bicycle Board has considered recommending bicycle registration to the City. Since bicycle registration could increase the possibility of cyclists recovering their stolen bicycles, bicyclists could be expected to support it. Our research found that most states and communities that considered bicycle registration decided not to do it because administering the system is too costly. In WV, motor vehicle license fee is based on vehicle weight. Considering that the typical bicycle weighs less than 1/100th the weight of the typical car, a bicycle license fee of even $1 would be disproportionately higher than motor vehicle registration fees but yet too little to be worth collecting.

Assessing property taxes on bicycles would probably also be prohibitively expensive. In Monongalia County, vehicle property tax is approximately 1.4% of the vehicle value. Considering the $300 average new bicycle price, the annual property tax on a typical bicycle would be $4.14. Again, the cost of collecting the tax would probably be more than the revenue.

The minimum insurance that the State requires motorists to carry is to protect citizens that motorists injure and property that motorists damage. The state doesn’t require the motorist to cover himself or herself. Considering that if a cyclist crashes, they usually only injure themselves and do little or no damage to property, again mandating the same insurance for bicyclists as for motorists would probably cost more to collect than the premium.

Can Mr. Bolyard’s issue be that his motorized transportation is too expensive? Yes, economically, bicycling is a great deal. The benefits to health, well being and our environment are even greater. Most cyclists also drive motor vehicles when appropriate but have also discovered the joy and freedom of riding their bikes when they can. The Morgantown Bicycle Board encourages Mr. Bolyard and all of his friends to give it a try. Preston County has some of the best bicycling in the world!

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