

Riding is a social good.

Part 1: The Missing Piece

Two pieces, actually...First, riding is a social good. Same as eating healthy, exercising and higher education. Everything we do that makes us stronger, clearer, smarter, and sharper means we can better help ourselves and our species. We become better husbands, wives, parents, and workers...better leaders and followers.

Riding motorcycles does all of this,...and it gets us from A to B with a smaller 'footprint', and saves us time, and reduces congestion and increases available parking. Win, win, win. *Win.*

So why isn't everyone riding?

Because it is harder. Sitting on a comfortable couch eating junk food, watching TV, smoking cigarettes, drinking, and uh,...it's all bad. As are cars, pizza and ice cream. But that stuff all feels soooo good...and I like every bit of it, too.

The people selling us our cars, pizza and ice cream are not going to tell us those things are bad for us. And I'm keeping my car, pizza and ice cream. I'm already eating about as healthy, exercising as much, and riding as often as I can.

What's missing?

Incentives! I want to be rewarded for doing the right thing. Because, ahem... this is America! Everyone here deserves this.

There are only two meaningful incentives. I already can easily ride in almost any weather to almost any destination—comfortably, efficiently and cost-effectively. Not enough.)

1. I also want to be able to save time filtering between all of the cars, just like riders in California ...and the entire rest of the world. It's statistically well proven to be far safer for everyone, and it's super easy once you've done it a few times.

2. I'd also like some legal protection in case something goes wrong. Like a 'vulnerable road user' law for all us walkers, bicyclers, skaters, skateboarders and motorcyclers. For everyone who uses roads not surrounded by glass, metal and airbags. We all need the same level of legal protection highway workers in states like Michigan enjoy. "Kill a worker: \$10,000 fine + a year in jail" roadside construction zone signs there read. We want that level of protection, too.

Those are the two missing pieces: Lane sharing ('splitting' or 'filtering') tolerance and Vulnerable Road User protection law.

It's that simple...

Part 2: How do we get there?

Begin with "all politics is local". There's no reason any municipality cannot enact a law to allow lane sharing and separately another to better protect vulnerable road users. Yes, such laws would be extremely tough to pass of course!, and anything like that is certain to be court challenged at state and federal levels. But this is where the pressures for reform and social change must begin.

Your city council and mayor can make it legal to filter through traffic on every road and surface street within their jurisdiction. And put up billboards and issue proclamations to educate the rest of the public.

Your town can pass laws to better protect vulnerable road users, too. Laws that encourage bicycling, walking, motorcycling and the other healthier ways of getting yourself from A to B.

Your city can become the most motorcycle, pedestrian and bicycle friendly place in the country, and can put up signage boasting this beside every road that enters your municipal city. Messages welcoming and supporting all these better ways of living, and encouraging visitors and citizens alike to partake of such healthier mobility options.

Auto makers and sellers ...and many other strong stakeholders won't be happy such activities are being incentivized, though. It will take much courage, commitment and perseverance to effect these changes.

...but maybe someday sooner than you think your community will become an even better place to live than it is now.

Just sayin'

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Part 3: Follow-up and tactical considerations.

Bicycles have the moral high ground. Sweet pathways got built, lane widths were striped off, and cities vie for acknowledgement as most bicycle friendly.

This isn't a good fit with the world we've built. 100+ years of infrastructure investments and preferred lifestyle patterns. Pedaling cannot be made practical for most. Too long commute distances, hills and the challenges of surrounding traffic are too much. America doesn't want to be the Netherlands. Denver cannot be Copenhagen.

Riders need three cities of 500K population or more, each with a few elected leaders willing to try. Mayors and councilors with motorcycles in their garages. The AMA, the MIC and Ride to Work should combine forces and target each with background strategic planning, campaign financing, quiet political lobbying, deal making, public education programs, and whatever else it takes.

Two of the chosen 'test' city efforts will fail. But one should succeed, and motorcycling will have established a working template for what is possible. A powerful model for all cities that shows everyone how to get others there.

Riding is a social good. Motorcycles and scooters offer the convenience, range and speed of cars, with a minimal eco/energy footprint and a broad range of personal health benefits.

They are more than toys for those with interest and discretionary funds.

If one big modern American city can incentivize riding, others will follow.

It could happen.



—Andy Goldfine 2013