

A Change in Direction

By Dave Dwyer

Madison - MSP funding. We now have a budget for the next two years for Wisconsin passed by the Legislature and signed by our Governor, and on time for a change. There are two effects I have seen on motorcycling, one is the cut in the DOT budget. This has resulted in what appears to be a \$98,000 reduction in money for the Motorcycle Safety Program (MSP) in fiscal year 2011, which starts July 1, 2010. This is the pot of money we contribute into every time we register our motorcycles and pay the extra money for the "M" endorsement on our driver license. With the continued increase in motorcycle registrations and license endorsements in Wisconsin, and across the country, now is not the time to cut state funding for motorcycle rider training and motorcycle awareness programs. As the current federal highway spending bill finishes its term that will mean the end of the \$25M in Motorcycle Safety Grants that were available. Wisconsin received in excess of \$100,000 each year of the program. Soon that money will not be available and the DOT wants to reduce the MSP state money by \$98K. Once again motorcycling and motorcycle safety comes up short in the effort to enact the "more important" programs in the state budget.

Insurance - The other one is the new requirement for mandatory insurance on all motor vehicles used on the road. The basic minimum liability insurance requirement has been raised from \$25K to \$300K. Having done some cost comparison-shopping in the past, the extra premium for the increased coverage was not a large amount of money. However, with the state of the economy this cost increase may be more than some people can now afford. One other cost increase we are going to see is the requirement that insurance companies stop using location in the state as one of the parts of their formula for deciding their rate structure. That means that those of us that live in rural parts of the state with a lower accident and theft rate will see our premiums rise to help cover the losses the insurance companies would incur if they are now required to lower the cost of their product in the large cities with their higher crash and crime rates. Drivers living in rural Wisconsin will now be subsidizing the insurance of the drivers in the big cities without having any of the benefits or conveniences that come with living in the cities.

Seatbelt Enforcement - There was one other item in the State budget that is going to affect everyone who operates a car or truck, that is the elimination of the secondary enforcement of the seatbelt law and replacing it with primary enforcement. Our people in charge of the budget writing committee claim this change is in the budget instead of coming as a stand-alone bill, to be voted up or down on its own merit, is because the Obama administration has included more money for states with primary seatbelt law enforcement in the stimulus package. Passing this adds to the money Wisconsin gets from Washington D. C. This is just one more way the government is using our money to coerce us into "doing what we are told".

ROW Violations - We are still working with Rep. Pridemore to find a way to step up the enforcement of the enhanced penalties for Right-of-way violators. The court system is asking for a list of driving schools that are willing to present the Share the Road program to violators. Bill Roberge, our Share the Road Director, is compiling that for us. Hopefully that will remove one of the obstacles to getting the law enforced as written.

Washington D. C. - Highway Spending Bill. In early July the House Highways and Transit Sub-committee passed an 800 page Surface Transportation bill and sent it to the full House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. This bill does not yet have a number, name or price tag, but the cost is expected to be huge, in the range of \$500 billion dollars over the next 6 years. The need to spend this large amount of money and the problems in figuring out how to pay for it has brought discussions between the House and Senate to a standstill. The Administration is also at odds with the spending outlined in the House bill. With Americans driving more fuel-efficient vehicles and actually driving less the revenue generated by the gas tax have been steadily falling. The gas tax has been the primary funding source for the federal highway bill in the past. There is no appetite in the Senate or the Administration for raising this tax to help fund the needs of the transportation infrastructure in the country.

Jeff Hennie, Vice-president of Government Relations of the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF) has been meeting with the Transportation Committee staff for the last several years to make sure this new bill will contain some motorcycle friendly language. There is the possibility that the new bill will have specific language dedicating more federal monies to be spent on Motorcycle Safety Programs. We will have to work to maintain and grow our federal government's commitment to funding motorcycle safety. Working with the MRF we will keep you informed on the progress, or lack of progress, in Washington.

Cash for Clunkers - Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) has introduced S. 1248, the Green Transportation Efficiency Act of 2009, aka the Green TEA bill. The Casey bill would provide a \$2500 voucher when trading in an older car or bike to purchase a brand new motorcycle from a participating, registered dealership. There are no cosponsors on this bill. This bill would authorize the program for one year from the date it is enacted. Sen. Casey is sponsoring this bill to help out his constituents at the Harley Davidson York Assembly plant. The bad part of this bill is that all the vehicles traded in will be crushed. We will be watching this legislation very closely to make sure the timeline is not extended. We do not want to see this turn into an "end of useful life" bill for motorcycles.

National Interest - AMA/MIC Sound Test. The Motorcycle Industry Council (MIC) has paid the Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) to develop a roadside noise test for highway motorcycles. This has been a priority of both AMA and MIC since AMA hosted the 2003 National Summit on Motorcycle Sound. This test is designed to determine if a motorcycle makes more exhaust noise than it should. This test will allow the police to write you a ticket based on a standard test. The ironic part is that if you are running an aftermarket exhaust system it was most likely manufactured by a company that is a member of the MIC. It was very likely sold through a Distributor that is a member of the MIC. You may have even bought it through an online retailer that gives a discount to AMA members. Now the MIC and AMA think you should get a ticket for using a product that has been manufactured and sold through their members or a business that gives you a discount for being a member. The AMA often touts their sound test for off-road motorcycles as helping to quiet the race bikes down. How effective were the mufflers on the machines at the last AMA sanctioned motorcycle race you attended?

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