



The Six NMI Talking Points

Recommendations to the USA States for Reducing Motorcyclist Fatalities

The following “talking points” help define the position of NMI in reference to the safety/danger of motorcycling on public roads in the USA:

1. Scientifically measure the danger of motorcycling

Riding upon a motorcycle on public roadways is dangerous, but the danger to motorcyclists and the danger of motorcycling to society* are not well documented or understood. Car occupants, including both drivers and passengers riding in automobiles, are called “motorists.” Motorcycle occupants, including both drivers and passengers riding upon motorcycles, are called “motorcyclists.”

* Societal Danger and Rates will be measured as to include the entire population.

Currently, based on Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) motorcyclists are killed 27 times more often than car occupants (motorists). This understates the danger because the occupancy rate of cars is about 1.4 times that of motorcycles. When the occupancy rates are considered, motorcyclists are fatally injured an astounding 38 times more often than car occupants. Another way to state the danger is that All-Other-Vehicles account for 99.4% of the Vehicle-Miles-Traveled leaving only 0.6% of the miles traveled by motorcycles, yet motorcycle drivers account for 21% of all drivers killed!

Allow Scientific Method to guide your program. "The Statement must be measurable and disprovable, the explanation difficult to manipulate, and reporting of results be completed in a truthful manner." This will help you guard against confirmation bias and “truthy” statements (those we wish to be true, but are not factual). Truthy statements sound good, and make us feel good to say them, independent of the facts.

2. Encourage Transparency with Fatality Rates

We believe that state and federal government Departments of Health, Law Enforcement, and Transportation should take an active role in managing the danger of motorcycling. To better encourage transparency, we encourage state governments to make current and target Motorcyclist Fatality Rates available to the public. Specifically, the danger should be disclosed to news media outlets and to all those involved in motorcycle safety/danger-reducing programs at both federal and state levels. State motorcycle training administrators, site managers, instructors, the general public, and federal safety administrators should be made aware of the danger, to avoid following tactics that would actually make the situation worse.

Motorcyclist Danger (per VMT) for 2015 was 24 Motorcyclist Fatalities per 100 Million Motorcycle Miles Traveled.

Motorcycle Societal Danger (per population) for 2015 was 16 Motorcyclist Crash Fatalities per Million Population.

In 2015, motorcycles represented only 0.66% of VMT but 14.1% (21% of all drivers) of crash fatalities. Based on historical experience, the rate of Motorcycle Crash Fatalities per Million Population can be reduced from the current 16 to no greater than 8.

One of the reasons for failure to comprehend the relative danger of motorcycling is that the numbers of other vehicles on the road are so much greater than the number of motorcycles. Currently the average ratio in the USA is one motorcycle per 150 cars. We encourage you to test this statement by counting the vehicles you see in the traffic stream.

3. Advocate for better engineered roadways and vehicles

Crashes are often precipitated by driver error resulting from confusion over paths of travel, changing speeds, signals, signage, surface problems, and other drivers. Roadways and vehicles can be engineered to both reduce the potential for crashes, and reduce injury should a crash occur. We support better engineering of roadways and vehicles; and the integration of "smart" devices that can be shown to reduce crashes. And importantly, the transportation system can be improved for law compliance and enforcement so that motorcycle drivers will be motivated to drive legally and responsibly.

4. Acknowledge that people respond to incentives, whether or not the incentives result in negative or positive fatality results

We support the separation of beginner training from motorcycle endorsement of licensing. Government should have responsibility for driver licensing, to ensure that all drivers know how to operate their vehicles legally and responsibly. Private industry may have responsibility for driver training. Private industry should be active and responsible for all sorts of other motorcycle training that is not linked to directly obtaining the motorcycle endorsement. When state subsidies and reimbursements are provided to motorcycle drivers in training, such incentives should apply to every student, including those who "opt-out."

SEPARATE the license/endorsement testing incentive from beginner training. Incorporate an "opt-out" attitude into the entire publicly funded state motorcycle training system to help limit motorcycling to that part of the population that are serious motorcyclists who are willing to put the time, money, and effort into understanding and managing the danger.

The Department responsible for issuing licenses (Motor Vehicles, Department of Licensing, Motor Vehicle Administration, etc.) should be in charge of licensing/endorsing including driver testing. State license examiners should not have any incentives or conflicts of interest with motorcycle training or motorcycle industry organizations.

State license examiners for the motorcycle endorsement should be motorcycle subject matter experts. History has taught us that unskillful motorcycle drivers will benefit greatly when given an expert explanation of why they failed the endorsement testing.

There is also Law Enforcement issues (using negative incentives, i.e. penalties) that are effective for reducing fatalities. These include enforcing laws regarding speeding, impaired driving, and the use non-street legal motorcycles (such as minibikes, pocket bikes, dirt bikes, etc) on public roads. Greater enforcement, and penalties for violators, of current laws regarding these areas would reduce motorcyclists fatalities.

5. Avoid state encouragement of drivers to use vehicles for recreation on public roads

Many of today's vehicles are capable of very aggressive acceleration and top speed. However, when a motorcycle crash occurs, motorcyclists have almost no protection from injury, and impact speed relates directly to the degree of injury. Speed is directly related to the potential for fatalities, and when motorcyclists use their machines for recreation, speeding is common. We believe that state government should specifically be limited from encouraging motorcycling for purposes other than transportation. In particular, departments of Health, Law Enforcement and Transportation should adopt the policy that motorcycle drivers should operate "At Suggested Speed Limit All The Time," (ASSPLATT).

All Drivers, including those driving motorcycles, must focus on operating their vehicles legally and responsibly. Respect and consideration for other roadway users should be emphasized in state sponsored licensing programs. We acknowledge and share concern that this point may negatively impact some state's motorcycle tourism programs. Our position is that private companies should be allowed to take the lead in promoting motorcycle tourism and recreation. Private schools may glamorize and romanticize motorcycling. State programs should be prevented from glamorizing motorcycling.

We also believe that the principles involved in being a good driver on public roadways do not change with different types of motor vehicles. For this reason, motorcycle drivers should also be taught the principles found in the state's approved driver's education curriculum and driver's manual used by all drivers. Drivers of motorcycles, while interacting with other roadway users, should be held to the same responsibilities and courtesies as drivers of any vehicle. Based on this concept, we do not encourage laws that give special privileges to motorcycle drivers.

6. Publicly sponsored (state) driver training programs can and should DIFFER from private training programs

We believe that public driver training programs should not promote motorcycling on public roads. We would support the concept of states being responsible for licensing and endorsement testing, and training be offered through private schools. These schools may offer training beyond that needed to pass the government testing for endorsement. When public driver training is offered, students should be made aware of the relative danger, and instruction should be limited to operating a vehicle in a legal and responsible manner. Endorsement testing must measure this knowledge and skill.

Since training has not proven to reduce motorcyclist crash or fatality rates, we encourage training programs to cultivate and promote an "opt-out" attitude for students. A student who has made an informed choice to opt-out of driving motorcycles on public roadways cannot contribute to the motorcycle driver fatality rate. Students in state programs should primarily learn about the extreme relative danger of motorcycling on public roadways. Private schools should be separate from and have no affiliation with state sponsored schools.

We acknowledge that it is difficult for private schools to take the lead with the "opt-out" philosophy. Not only should private schools be allowed to reject the "opt-out" approach to reducing fatalities, they should be allowed to encourage people to drive motorcycles on public roadways. Private schools should be allowed to offer "advanced" and performance training. Publicly sponsored schools should not offer advanced skill training above what is proper for operating a motorcycle legally and responsibly.

Theoretical Note: The motorcycling participation rate directly and causally accounts for the increase or decrease in motorcycle crash fatality counts. When the number of persons participating in motorcycling goes up, the fatality count goes up. When the number of persons participating in motorcycling goes down, the fatality count goes down. Societal Danger, that is Crash Victims divided by Population, is a measure of participation. Specifically, National Motorcycle Institute recommends the above actions will both lower motorcycle crash fatality counts (Societal) as well as Motorcycle Driver and Occupant Fatality Counts.