

Bruce on Bikers' Rights

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May 2007



INTELLIGENT TRANSPORT & HIGHWAY AUTOMATION

In the grand scheme, is a place for motorcycles assured?

On 11 April 2007, Chairman of the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Mark V. Rosenker gave a speech at the Northwestern University Transportation Center that presented an intriguing glimpse into the future of American roadway transportation. I encourage you to take a moment and read the transcript:

<http://www.nts.gov/Speeches/rosenker/mvr070411.htm>

In it, he projects his vision of the roads of tomorrow ... a virtual railway of computer-controlled conveyances (think cattle cars) enabled by a mind-boggling array of intelligent transport systems (ITS), highway automation, vehicle-to-vehicle and vehicle-to-infrastructure integration ... reinforced with telematics for vehicle navigation (and occupant tracking) ... and prefaced by the following:

*“In aviation, the average is 700 to 800 fatalities a year, almost all associated with private pilots in small general aviation aircraft... By comparison, about 43,000 people lose their lives on the nation’s highways each year. For aviation fatalities to match those of highway, we would have to have a commercial airline hull loss accident every day... So, while you may know of the [NTSB] Safety Board based on our aviation work, tonight I’d like to focus on highway safety... [W]hile we accomplished much in the past decade to improve the crashworthiness of automobiles, we have reached some practical limits in combating the physical forces involved in crashes. It is time to move beyond crash mitigation and enter a new era where technology will help us prevent accidents. I recognize that this will be a tough battle to win. Less than 1% of accidents are fatal, so to save one life, we must prevent more than a hundred crashes... We can no longer be satisfied with trying to protect people who get into crashes. We must instead use the technology at our command to **prevent crashes from happening.**”*

Mr. Rosenker’s acknowledgement that far more highway injuries and deaths can be prevented by targeting **crash avoidance** rather than **crash survival** is encouraging. But on the other hand, the fact that he failed to include or even mention motorcycles in his grand scheme of intelligent transport and highway automation systems forces me to ask this question:

IS there a place for motorcycles on the highways of tomorrow?

This is not a new question, and I am certainly not the first one to ask it. The debate goes back a decade or more, as is reflected by this 1998 article originated by the Federation of European Motorcyclists Associations (FEMA) and the Motorcycle Riders Foundation (MRF)...

<http://www.mrf.org/pdf/WhitePapers/Volume5-1998/FromEuropetotheUnitedS.pdf>

...in which FEMA's Simon Willard advised the following:

"[R]oad transport is undergoing some fundamental changes. It is the responsibility of all riders to make efforts to ensure that motorcycling remains enjoyable for future generations by becoming active in their own national riders' rights organisation."

Mr. Willard's concerns were reiterated in this 2003 paper transmitted by FEMA, the MRF, the American Motorcyclist Association (AMA) and allied organizations...

<http://www.unece.org/trans/doc/2003/wp29/TRANS-WP29-130-inf01e.pdf>

...which contained this request:

"The recognition that certain types of vehicles will not be compatible with some ITS applications, requires that the rights of the owners and users of such vehicles be considered... It is also a general principle that regulations applied to one vehicle category should not result in the owner or user of another category of vehicle being disadvantaged... The parties to this paper therefore request the relevant United Nations bodies formally to recognize the following principle: 'That where a vehicle or a category of vehicles are not compatible with an ITS application, it is accepted that the vehicles' incompatibility will not result in its being excluded from any part of the road system that the vehicle currently uses and that in future would utilize that ITS application.'"

Is that request being honored? Australia's Monash University Accident Research Centre attempted to answer that question, at least in part, with their research study entitled "Intelligent Transport Systems and Motorcycle Safety", published in July of 2006:

<http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/reports/muarc260.pdf>

Their research was comprehensive, but left them with more questions than conclusions. Two of their conclusions, however, seem as relevant here in the U.S. as they are down under:

- *"Some motorcycling groups have expressed concern about the potential for ITS technologies to automate aspects of the riding task or to compromise motorcycle safety. It is critical that the views of the motorcycling fraternity be properly researched and understood, and that this knowledge be used to inform the design and deployment of technologies which are acceptable to them. There have been no formal studies of the acceptance of riders to ITS in motorcycles."*
- *"There is no known strategy for the design, development, deployment and evaluation of ITS in motorcycles."*

But wait a moment. Does that second conclusion *really* apply to us? Maybe so, maybe no:

Mr. Rosenker did not include motorcycles in his vision of our road transport future. And, I was unable to find anything that resembled a “strategy for the design, development, deployment and evaluation of ITS in motorcycles” on the website of the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT) ITS Joint Program Office:

<http://www.its.dot.gov/index.htm>

BUT... intelligent transportation systems for motorcycles were discussed during the NTSB Public Forum on Motorcycle Safety on 12-13 September 2007, and those comments are available in the searchable (but not copyable) PDF transcripts for both days downloadable from here:

http://www.nts.gov/events/symp_motorcycle_safety/symp_motorcycle_safety.htm

AND... intelligent transportation systems are an explicit part of the mission and agenda for the newly-formed **Federal Highway Administration Motorcyclist Advisory Council** (MAC-FHWA)...

<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/mac/index.htm>

...whose members include the following:

- Mark Bloschock [mbloscho@dot.state.tx.us] -Texas Dept. of Transportation
- Jeff Hennie [jeff@mrf.org] - Motorcycle Riders Foundation
- Darrell Killion [killiond1@yahoo.com] - ABATE of South Dakota
- Ken Kiphart [nvriders@dps.state.nv.us]- State Motorcycle Safety Administrators
- Robert McClune [bob.mcclune@pottersbeads.com]- North American Potters Industries
- Ed Moreland [edmoreland.ama@erols.com] - American Motorcyclist Association
- Gerald Salontai [Gsalontai@kleinfelder.com] - Kleinfelder Incorporated
- Kathy VanKleeck [kvankleeck@mic.org] - Motorcycle Industry Council
- Donald Vaughn [VaughnD@dot.state.al.us] - Alabama Dept. of Transportation
- Steve Zimmer [Cambolt@aol.com] ABATE of Ohio Inc

In a transcript of their meeting on 24 October 2006...

<http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/mac/fulltranscript102406.htm>

...ABATE of Ohio’s Steve Zimmer had this to say:

*“Intelligent transportation is another issue we need to be concerned about because as intelligent transportation systems develop we need to make sure that motorcycles are considered in the development and are not **excluded at the end.**”*

I think Steve is right. And based on the research I just shared with you, I fear his statement may be prophetic. I fear that the answer to the question...

“IS there a place for motorcycles on the highways of tomorrow?”

...just might be **NO**.

So... what are we as motorcyclists to do about that?

For many years now, visionary bikers' rights activists have been warning us that we should be “concerned” about being “excluded” from the roadways of tomorrow. A decade ago, we were advised that “[it] is the responsibility of all riders to make efforts to ensure that motorcycling remains enjoyable for future generations.”

And have we met that responsibility? Apparently not. And why not? **BECAUSE WE HAVE FAILED TO FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT.** As I wrote last December:

“Political history teaches us that few things bring people together like the threat of a common and formidable foe. That's what United our States ... how the Allies won World War II ... and why Dubya got re-elected. But for some perplexing reason, the motorcycling community seems exempt from that axiom... At a time when we should be banding together as brothers, instead we squabble like Scottish Lords. Rather than broadening their political base by focusing on issues of interest and benefit to all motorcyclists, some MROs and their mouthpieces are leading the charge in the opposite direction. Platforms purported to champion bikers' rights are often subverted soapboxes...

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<http://pub42.bravenet.com/forum/3562429698/fetch/801905/>

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...for agendas that serve no purpose other than to isolate and alienate the very riders we most desperately need to attract and enlist. MRO leaders bemoan increasing apathy and declines in membership. But rather than narrow their focus to timely and relevant issues with broad appeal, some seek out only the decreasing few who share their world view, chastising or ignoring all others.”

This must end. We must narrow our focus to the issues of greatest importance and broadest appeal if we are to succeed politically and survive socially. And I can think of no other issue that should unite all motorcyclists more than...

OUR RIGHT TO RIDE OUR MOTORCYCLES!

Until Next Time ... Ride Long, Ride Free!

Bruce Arnold