

Will Ontario's tougher measures against distracted driving, 'dooring' and passing bikes too closely make us safer?



RENE JOHNSTON / TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

By: [Alex Ballingall](#) Published on Tue Mar 18 2014

Cracking down on motorists and cyclists who flout the rules of the road will make the streets safer for everyone — at least in the Ontario government's estimation.

The minority Liberals at Queen's Park introduced a new bill this week that jacks up penalties for a slew of traffic offences. It doubles the maximum fines to \$1,000 for distracted driving and for "dooring" a passing cyclist. The bill also introduces a new rule requiring motorists to maintain a one-metre distance when passing a cyclist.

One-metre rule

The bill introduces a rule requiring motorists to keep a one-metre distance from cyclists on the road.

California recently put forward its own version of this — the "three foot" law — joining a list of jurisdictions in Canada and the U.S. trying to do more to prevent cyclist deaths, said Jared Kolb, a spokesperson for CycleTO.

The change was prompted by a [coroner's review of cycling deaths from 2006 to 2010](#), which found that a "majority" of biking fatalities involving a motor vehicle occurred when the motorist was trying to pass the cyclist.

Kolb doesn't expect statistics to show an immediate surge in safety, but believes it will make a difference in the long run.

“This is crucial for how we educate drivers going forward,” he said, describing how the rule can be taught in drivers’ school and included in government safety handbooks.

“These things take time,” he said.

“Dooring” clampdown

One of the great fears of every urban cyclist is the dreaded “door prize,” awarded when a car door swings out into the bike lane, and collision ensues.

Like the distracted driving penalty, the Liberals’ new bill hikes the penalty for “dooring” a passing cyclist — from a maximum of \$500 to \$1,000.

Daniel Flanzig is a lawyer in New York City who says 50 per cent of the cases he works on involve a cyclist injured in a “dooring” incident. The city has long been subject to anti-dooring laws on the municipal and state levels, though **Flanzig** doesn’t believe they act as a deterrent. However, he says that’s mainly because cops in New York don’t take infractions to court unless they personally witness the “dooring”.

“I don’t think it’s actually ever been a deterrent, but I think it works very, very well when I have a civil claim,” he said, adding that he’d welcome stiffer fines for “dooring” in New York, and supports the increased penalties in Ontario.

Kolb agrees, calling the tougher dooring fine a “step forward.” Still, if the law is to be effective, he thinks education campaigns need to follow when the government decides to throw the book. He’d like to see a campaign to teach people to use their hand closest to the middle of the vehicle, forcing them to twist and look before opening a car door.

“I think there’s an opportunity here to change how we go about opening a (car) door,” Kolb said.

http://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2014/03/18/will_ontarios_tougher_measures_against_distracted_driving_dooring_and_passing_bikes_too_closely_make_us_safer.html