

Comments to Kansas Senate Transportation Committee

Topic: Zipper Merge

Ladies and gentlemen, Senator Hawk asked me to explain to you why I suggested to him that the Kansas Legislature might explore the potential uses for a “zipper merge” law in Kansas. I am happy to do that. I live in Manhattan and all my descendants—two daughters and their husbands and children-- live in Knoxville, Tennessee. As you can imagine, I like to visit them frequently, so I drive back and forth to Knoxville several times a year. On one of those trips, maybe in the state of Illinois, I was cruising along and noticed a sign that said “Zipper merge ahead” or something like that. I had never heard of zipper merge, so I paid close attention to the next signs. What I saw was astounding. The cars along the busy highway were merging to the right, one at a time and peacefully. So, of course, I followed their example of allowing cars in the left lane to merge into the right lane. About a half mile later as our speed gradually reduced from 65 down to about 50 miles an hour, I noticed that the state highway workers were working in the left lane to repair the road or maybe a bridge at that place.

I was impressed that the traffic flowed so smoothly through that temporary narrowing. I know that this phenomenon might not exist at all places and times, but at the time I was there, all the drivers were observing and following the merge signs. It was not a particularly busy time of day, but the sequential and orderly merging of high-speed traffic was impressive. And there were no highway police cars around to catch offenders. Nobody was slamming on brakes, nobody was trying to sneak ahead in the line, and my drive continued to be smooth and peaceful.

I believe that most of the highways in Kansas are not as busy as many of the highways in Illinois, but there may be some spots that could benefit from a law that would allow the creation of temporary “zipper merge” lanes. I think that the costs of creating the use of zipper merging would be small, compared to the potential costs of accidents or bad tempers. That is why I suggested to Senator Hawk that Kansas might want to consider having a law to allow the highway department to create and enforce temporary “zipper merge” lanes in at least certain areas of the state of Kansas, and that such a law might allow for a learning period before being strictly enforced.

Thank you for keeping Kansas roads safe and up to date, and for allowing me to speak to you today.

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