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TOPEKA

SENATE CHAMBER

COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS
 WAYS & MEANS (RANKING MINORITY MEMBER)
 UTILITIES
 TRANSPORTATION
 JOINT COMMITTEE ON STATE BUILDING
 CONSTRUCTION
 JOINT COMMITTEE ON LEGISLATIVE BUDGET

January 23, 2022

Senator Tom Hawk: **Proponent** SB333 on “Zipper Merging Study”

Chairman Peterson, Vice Chair Claeys, Ranking Member and Committee Members: I received a request from a long-term constituent, Dr. Betty Stevens, this summer to look into “zipper merging”, particularly around construction zones, as some other states have, as a way to improve the efficiency of driving when there is traffic congestion, and perhaps a way to reduce the quantity and frequency of road rage.

Below is the main email of the request I received:

Dr. Betty Steven’s Email Request: *“I’ve been noticing that apparently some states have laws about merging for construction zones, called “zipper merging.” Kansas does not have laws about that so student drivers are not required to learn this procedure. Zipper merging is very helpful because most drivers who approach a construction zone typically stay in the “busy” (right) lane and get angry if someone tries to “cut in” ahead of them. In fact, sometimes a large truck will intentionally block the left lane to prevent over-eager cars from passing and then merging right at the construction zone. Some states have official signs that show a “zipper merge” symbol. I’d like to see a new law, with a “learning period” to encourage zipper merging, especially on the 4-lane highways and interstate highways. I suppose that getting such a law would be a long process, but I think it would be good anyway.”*

Video on Zipper Merging: Assuming that the technology works, here is a **short video** explaining to anyone listening into our committee what is specifically meant by the term “Zipper Merging” and how it would work in a congested construction zone where traffic needs to merge.

As I explored this issue following Dr. Steven’s request for consideration in our Transportation Committee, I made a contact with KDOT. I suspect they will give testimony, but I did want to share with our Committee that they did not think a statute change was necessary. I also found out that KDOT had used this procedure in some locations. As I discussed this with our Chair, it did seem to me that a discussion on this might have some benefit and that should we chose to pass a bill, that a KDOT study would be the most appropriate action at this time. We also discussed how a hearing where we might make a special point about addressing and reducing what seems to be an increase of “road rage” in some of our drivers. That Committee discussion could be a productive message to our fellow Kansans.

Legislative Research: Below is some material that Legislative Research provided me as I researched this possibility of encouraging signage and perhaps even references in our Kansas Driving Handbook:

Kansas law does not mention zipper merges.

In 2016, KDOT urged motorists to zipper merge for a US-69 project in the Kansas City area and provided a fun “how-to” video (see <https://www.ksdot.org/bureaus/kcmetro/zipper-merge.asp>). Nebraska also has encouraged it: <https://dot.nebraska.gov/news-media/transportation-tidbits/zipper-merge/>

The Kansas Driving Handbook (available from <https://www.ksrevenue.or/dovlicenses.html>) addresses merge maneuvers in only a couple of places; one of those specifies a 4- to 6-second space between vehicles, which a zipper merge would not provide, and also says “if another driver needs to change lanes suddenly, slow down and let them merge.”

According to the Public Service Administrator for Driver Education at the Kansas State Department of Education, driver’s education curricular standards mention merging but zipper merges are not specified. She sent those standards (attached).

The Director of Traffic Safety at DCCCA, with which KDOT contracts for traffic safety services (the Kansas Traffic Safety Resource Office), points to information on zipper merges that group provides: Brochure - <http://www.ktsro.org/files/Its-All-About-Safety-brochure.pdf>; Web page - <https://www.ktsro.org/road-design> (includes the KDOT video).

I’ve read Illinois has law on merging, and it’s used in states including Minnesota, Missouri, North Carolina, Montana, and New York. I’ll plan to look at whether that’s actually in law or a DOT initiative.

Direction to KDOT to study zipper merges perhaps could be added to KSA 68-2314c or another section associated with the Eisenhower Legacy Transportation Program.

Mike Matson Column: Finally, as I researched this idea, an excellent editorial column by Mike Matson was printed in our local newspaper, The Manhattan Mercury, that made a point about how we might be safer on our roads and highways by reducing some of the anger that he had observed, one in particular on a major roadway in Manhattan, and that by pausing to think, think, think we might all be safer. Mr. Matson’s excellent column is attached to my testimony and gives me pause as a driver to take a little more time when other driver’s poor driving (in my opinion) stirs up my emotions and leads to some fantasy road rage even on my part. Below is his excellent column and driver advice:



• Mike Matson

THE MERCURY

On Second Thought

This column was published January 8, 2022 in the [Manhattan Mercury](#).

Days of impulsivity, apathy and thinking about thinking

There are no shoulders on Marlatt Avenue, so, when I saw the two cars stopped ahead of me, I had no choice but to slow down, stop, then make my way around what was a high volume confrontation. Apparently, the trailing car honked at the leading car, the driver of the leading car took umbrage sufficient that he slammed on the brakes, exited his vehicle and lit into the honker.

My Marlatt road rager was not the outlier. We're surrounded by anger, resentment, sadness, and apathy. The pandemic and its fallout on our existence has forced us onto a narrow highway with no shoulders.

Talk to people in the criminal justice system and you will hear stories with this common thread: More people are taking more umbrage these days. Friends in the mental health field tell me disruptions from the norm, from what we know, often leads to a shock that comes with realizing you're unprepared for change.

There's a simple, but eloquent phrase popular in some addiction recovery circles: "Think, think, think." The same verb, three times. The implication is to purposefully force yourself into the second thought, because the first one sucked.

That SOB honked at me for no reason. He's wrong, I'm right and he needs to know it.

A second thought can allow for a better outcome.

He honked at me and, yeah, I'm angry, but I'ma let it slide.

When you allow yourself the time to think about thinking, the third thought brings even more clarity and very often, introspection.

Maybe I should have used my turn signal.



When, all of a sudden (read: nearly two years), we wake up and find our world has changed, we lack the wherewithal to deal with it. It's stressful to go through a process of understanding the world as we thought it was, is no longer there.

A quote from a recent column by Elizabeth Weil about climate change connected specifically to California wildfires here to stay, hit home. "We're living through a discontinuity – the moment where the experience and expertise you've built up over time cease to work."

It's not society's job, nor the government, church, police department or the school, to bend to my will. Ditto my neighbor, family member, professional colleague or fellow motorist.

There may also be an element of entitlement working here. We lived for decades getting what we wanted, never being put in a position to even have to consider giving it a second thought. I'll always remember the palpable joy in our household on April 15, 2020, over the arrival on our front porch of a case of twenty-four rolls of toilet paper.

These are the days of impulsivity and apathy. We are in the throes of crisis. Another way to think about it (a second thought), is we are connected to each other as we all struggle with a host of daily events and circumstances that are not like they used to be and have forced us from our comfort zones.

By their very nature, impulsivity and apathy lead to a lack of caring and respecting others. Next thing you know, you've taken enough umbrage to stop your car in the middle of Marlatt Avenue and you're all up in the grill of a fellow motorist.

A third thought. We can acknowledge this societal evolution, realize that we're unprepared, dig in and become prepared. Perhaps starting with the notion that the world does not revolve around me.

It is my job to recognize change, to take less umbrage, then adapt.

Mike Matson's latest book, [Courtesy Boy: A True Story of Addiction](#), is the creative nonfiction story of his young adult years, when negative traits and behaviors that preceded addiction were in full bloom. Available at bookstores and [online](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tom Hawk". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Senator Tom Hawk—District 22

Kansas City Metro

2016), the Kansas Department of Transportation is introducing the '**zipper merge**' for the first time in Kansas on the U.S. 69 and 119th Street Interchange Bridge Repair Project in Overland Park (Johnson County).

In Kansas, drivers are familiar with the standard 'early merge' method for traffic control through work zones. With the early merge method, when approaching a work zone, drivers believe it's best to merge as soon as possible into the open lane. But early merging forces traffic in the open lane to slow down considerably creating back ups in the open lane and frustrations for drivers.



What is a Zipper Merge?

When a lane is closed in a construction work zone, a 'zipper merge' occurs when drivers use both lanes of traffic up until reaching the defined merge area, where they then alternate turns in "zipper" fashion into the open lane.

When drivers see the "lane closed ahead" sign and traffic backing up, drivers should stay in their current lane up to the point of merge and then take turns with the other drivers to safely and smoothly merge into the remaining open lane.

When traffic volumes are heavy and traffic is moving slow, it is much safer for motorists to remain in their current lane until the point where traffic can orderly take turns merging. [Watch our short video to see how the zipper merge operates here.](#)

Congestion is a frustration shared by all drivers on our roadways. Drivers should be considerate and take turns merging, using both lanes, allowing merging space for the other drivers. Drivers sometimes straddle the center line trying to block a lane for oncoming traffic wishing to merge; this is illegal and drivers can be ticketed for this traffic violation.



Early Merge



Zipper Merge

How will the zipper merge work on the U.S. 69 project?

In advance of the U.S. 69 project work zone, the zipper merge signage will be activated, when traffic queues are heaviest, generally during morning and evening rush hours. During slower times of the day or night, drivers will continue to utilize the early merge method following the work zone signage.

Drivers need to be observant. This is a dynamic system, which means that the message boards will tell drivers when to utilize the zipper merge through the work zone. The message boards will turn on when congestion is detected and traffic is slow, and will turn off when congestion lessens, but drivers still need to be cautious and use good judgement through this and every work zone.

The Minnesota Department of Transportation, along with many other states including the Missouri Department of Transportation, utilize the zipper merge for traffic control through construction work zones. Here is a look at the Minnesota DOT's zipper merge video: <http://www.dot.state.mn.us/zippermerge/>

