



City of Somerville, Massachusetts

Legislation Text

File #: 23-1162, **Version:** 1

Agenda Summary

That the Chief of Police adopt a policy of de-prioritizing enforcement against cyclists who treat red lights as stop signs when it is safe to do so (the “Idaho Stop”) in recognition of the compelling United States Department of Transportation data supporting this practice.

Official Text

WHEREAS: Somerville should prioritize its public safety resources according to a fact-based understanding of road safety; AND

WHEREAS: In March, 2022, the United States Department of Transportation’s (U.S. DOT) National Highway Traffic Safety Administration released a Fact Sheet which concluded that “many States have enacted bicyclist stop-as-yield laws to enhance safety and protect cyclists. Based upon the current research and data available, these laws show added safety benefits for bicyclists in States where they were evaluated, and may positively affect the environment, traffic, and transportation.”; AND

WHEREAS: Idaho first legalized the so-called “Idaho Stop” in 1982, which allows cyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs, and red lights as stop signs, when no pedestrians are present, and observed a 14.5% decrease in cyclist injuries from crashes the following year; AND

WHEREAS: Since that time, seven other states have legalized this practice, and data analysis based on these states shows consistent improvements in public safety; AND

WHEREAS: Such laws “do not negate a bicyclist’s responsibility to yield to other traffic before crossing an intersection or to follow all work zone traffic rules,” and furthermore “a naturalistic study of bicyclists in Florida’s Tampa Bay area found that bicyclists highly complied with general traffic rules (88.1% in the daytime, 87.5% at night). In contrast, drivers were mostly noncompliant with the law on yielding to bicyclists’ right-of-way... Additionally, there is no evidence showing bicyclist stop-as-yield laws have increased bike conflicts with other bikes or pedestrians,” according to this U.S. DOT Fact Sheet; AND

WHEREAS: According to an October 2022 StreetsBlog article “One of the Biden Administration's top road safety officials has come out in favor of legalizing the so-called "Idaho stop...the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's acting administrator, Ann Carlson, said her agency has been reviewing the data on the Idaho stop for several years and has concluded that "it provides additional safety benefits for cyclists"; AND

WHEREAS: In Massachusetts, municipalities such as Somerville do not have the legal authority to single-handedly legalize this practice, but they do have discretion in how they choose to prioritize various enforcement actions; AND

WHEREAS: The Somerville Police Department has been increasing its ticketing and warnings to cyclists practicing the “Idaho Stop”; NOW BE IT THEREFORE

RESOLVED: That the City Council urges the Administration and the Police Department to review the public safety data regarding the Idaho Stop and to only focus enforcement on this practice when cyclists fail to yield to pedestrians or vehicles which have the right of way.