



## CONTROVERSIES IN TSE

By Skeet Gaul (TSE Instructor & WTSEA Treasurer)

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### ISSUE: Proper Use of Left Lane

Some folks teach kids that the left lane is “ok to use” in heavy traffic situations. The proper use of the left lane is really very clear, whether we like it or not. RCW 46.61.100 specifically says that we are to stay to the right half of the roadway; or the right lane when two lanes are going the same direction; or the right lanes when there are three lanes or more going in the same direction.

Number (4) of that RCW clouds the water a little. It states that “It is a traffic infraction to drive continuously in the left lane of a multilane roadway when it impedes the flow of other traffic”. Some would suggest that it is ok to drive in the left lane as long as we aren’t impeding traffic. But how can we always know if we are impeding traffic? A person might wish to pass the car ahead, but we eliminated that opportunity because we are blocking their potential path of travel.

In my mind, it is clear that the far left lane is for turning left; entering the roadway from the left; passing; or to avoid a conflict with our path of travel; or more recently, to avoid a conflict with emergency vehicles located on the right side of the roadway. Nowhere does it tell us we may use the far left lane for normal travel under any conditions.

It is possible for a person to interpret RCW 46.61.100 number (2) to mean we can **only** use the far right lane. Perhaps the law should have included an “s” on the word lane (see in red, below). But, the way it is worded, we can still discern the intended meaning in that it includes “the lane then available for traffic” which would include all lanes to the right of the “left lane.”

Therefore, travel in the left lane, even under heavy traffic situations, would definitely not be conducive to “best practice” for left lane use.

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### RCW 46.61.100

#### Keep right except when passing, etc

(1) Upon all roadways of sufficient width a vehicle shall be driven upon the right half of the roadway, except as follows:

(a) When overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction under the rules governing such movement;

(b) When an obstruction exists making it necessary to drive to the left of the center of the highway; provided, any person so doing shall yield the right-of-way to all vehicles traveling in the proper direction upon the unobstructed portion of the highway within such distance as to

constitute an immediate hazard;

(c) Upon a roadway divided into three marked lanes and providing for two-way movement traffic under the rules applicable thereon;

(d) Upon a street or highway restricted to one-way traffic; or

(e) Upon a highway having three lanes or less, when approaching a stationary authorized emergency vehicle, tow truck or other vehicle providing roadside assistance while operating warning lights with three hundred sixty degree visibility, or police vehicle as described under \*RCW [46.61.212\(2\)](#).

**(2) Upon all roadways having two or more lanes for traffic moving in the same direction, all vehicles shall be driven in the right-hand lane then available for traffic, except** (a) when overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction, (b) when traveling at a speed greater than the traffic flow, (c) when moving left to allow traffic to merge, or (d) when preparing for a left turn at an intersection, exit, or into a private road or driveway when such left turn is legally permitted. On any such roadway, a vehicle or combination over ten thousand pounds shall be driven only in the right-hand lane except under the conditions enumerated in (a) through (d) of this subsection.

(3) No vehicle towing a trailer or no vehicle or combination over ten thousand pounds may be driven in the left-hand lane of a limited access roadway having three or more lanes for traffic moving in one direction except when preparing for a left turn at an intersection, exit, or into a private road or driveway when a left turn is legally permitted. This subsection does not apply to a vehicle using a high occupancy vehicle lane. A high occupancy vehicle lane is not considered the left-hand lane of a roadway. The department of transportation, in consultation with the Washington state patrol, shall adopt rules specifying (a) those circumstances where it is permissible for other vehicles to use the left lane in case of emergency or to facilitate the orderly flow of traffic, and (b) those segments of limited access roadway to be exempt from this subsection due to the operational characteristics of the roadway.

**(4) It is a traffic infraction to drive continuously in the left lane of a multilane roadway when it impedes the flow of other traffic.**

(5) Upon any roadway having four or more lanes for moving traffic and providing for two-way movement of traffic, a vehicle shall not be driven to the left of the center line of the roadway except when authorized by official traffic control devices designating certain lanes to the left side of the center of the roadway for use by traffic not otherwise permitted to use such lanes, or except as permitted under subsection (1) (b) of this section. However, this subsection shall not be construed as prohibiting the crossing of the center line in making a left turn into or from an alley, private road or driveway.