

## OLD CARS AND NEW LAWS PLUS WHAATSUUP HERE AND THERE

by Larry Becker



On Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>, AAA issued a statement saying that the EPA and gasoline retailers should halt the sale of E15, a new ethanol-gasoline blend that could damage millions of vehicles and void car warranties. AAA said that just 12 million of more than 240 million cars, trucks and SUVs in use have manufacture's approval for E15. Flex-fuel vehicles, 2012 and newer GM vehicles, 2013 Fords and 2001 and newer Porsches are the exceptions, according to AAA. BMW, Chrysler, Nissan, Toyota and VW have said their warranties will not cover fuel-related claims caused by E15. Ford, Honda, Kia, Mercedes-Benz and Volvo have said E15 use will void warranties, AAA Chief Robert Darbelnet told the USA newspaper on Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>, citing potential corrosive damage to the fuel lines, gaskets, and engine components. A three year study by automakers and the oil industry show that E15 was linked to engine and fuel systems failures, says Bob Greco of the American Petroleum Institute. The National Association of Convenience Stores said that it's worried about E15 damaging gas station pumps and fuel lines, as well as consumer liability issues. (Information from article by Gary Strauss of the USA Today newspaper on Nov. 30<sup>th</sup>)

If you think our traffic is bad, be lucky that you are not in Russia. During the first week of December, there was a big snow storm that caused a 125 mile back-up. Russians officials say that they might have done a better job of clearing the roads.

Drivers in bike- friendly cities may be doing double takes as bicycle-specific traffic signals pop up alongside the traditional round red, yellow and green signals controlling intersections. At least 16 cities, including Austin, Denver, Minneapolis, Salem, Oregon, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington D.C. have installed the lights, which feature a bicycle-shaped signal, according to an October study commissioned by the Oregon Department of transportation and the Federal Highway Administration. The reason for the new signals is that bicyclists can be at risk when entering an intersection on a yellow light that allows enough time for cars to clear the intersection, but not for bikes, the study found. Even traditional green lights may not allow enough time for a bicyclist starting from a stopped position to make it across. Bicycle signals can also help prevent collisions when a motorist is turning right and a bicyclist is going straight, by giving the cyclist a head start of a few seconds. Some bicycle signals stand alone; others are incorporated into regular traffic signals. Some are timed, and others are activated when a bicyclist approaches the intersection, the study found.

Highway lanes that charge cars rising tolls as traffic increases are becoming the future for the U.S.A.'s clogged urban expressways. A dozen now operate across the nation and 18 more are under development.

The “dynamic pricing” lanes have just come to two of the biggest and most congested metro areas in the U.S.: Los Angeles and Washington D. C. They join Atlanta, another notoriously congested city, and other metro areas where the roads, mainly called HOT (high occupancy toll) lanes – because carpoolers ride free – are growing in popularity after a rocky start. They are also planned or under construction on congested urban corridors from Seattle to El Paso, Dallas, Baltimore and other cities. Projects such as the one in Los Angeles and Northern Virginia, near Washington D. C., which rolled out in November, likely represent the future of urban tolling in the U. S., because they allow transportation planners to get more mileage out of the existing highway systems, experts say. Even some frequent critics of tolling on interstates like the fluctuating tolling. “It gives drivers another option,” says Greg Cohen, president of the American Highway Users Alliance. “It is only feasible in very congested areas” Cohen said. (Information from article by Larry Copeland and Paul Overberg of USA Today newspaper)

Hybrid and electric cars need labeling inside and out to warn rescuers of the hazards posed by their high voltage systems after a serious crash, according to an influential industry panel. Hybrids and electric vehicles should have inch high letters or badges on both sides and the rear that are visible to first responders from at least 50 feet, says the committee of experts from SAE International , formerly the Society of Automotive Engineers.

Progressive and several other auto insurance companies are seeking drivers approval to install Snapshot, a device that can be installed in any car built after 1996. The device collects data on how often drivers are hard-braking (often a characteristic of speeders and tailgaters), when they are on the road (do they drive during dangerous hours after bars close?), and how far they are driving (because more hours behind the wheel correspond with a likelihood of getting into an accident). The international consulting firm Towers Watson reports that the U.S. is on the brink of an insurance revolution with usage-based insurance. At present, the Snapshot device is only installed in vehicles whose owners volunteer to do so. Progressive Insurance Company say that when customers agree to plug in Snapshot into their cars data ports, they can end up saving up to 30% rates.

Reverse tolls!!! Three men in California devised a way to use toll bridge’s and pay no toll, but collect their own toll. Rob the toll booth! Three men have been arrested for robbing the toll booths at the Carquinez Bridge near San Francisco. They also have been charged with robbing the toll booth three times between late 2011 and May 2012. They robbed the toll takers of between \$5,000 and \$10,000. The California Highway Patrol is investigation the involvement of as many as seven more people.

Not all of the following state bills are laws at this time. They have recently been introduced and are currently under consideration by the respective state legislatures. Many newly elected officials will take office on January 1<sup>st</sup>, so we see many new bills introduced soon after the first of 2013.

## **ALASKA**

**Big Nails!!! Transportation officials hope giant nails will help prevent landslides on Lookout Mountain near Fort Payne. The state Dept. of Transportation has hired Soil Nail Launcher Inc. of Grand Junction, Colo., to shoot long, nail like tubes into slumping soil inside the city limits. Officials say the work will cost a little less than \$3 million.**

## **CALIFORNIA**

**State Sen. Ted Leiu had floated the idea of asking voters to triple the state's car tax. He had called his planned legislation to put the question on the 2014 ballot, a test to see what the two-thirds majority Legislature means. The Torrance area Senator has changed his mind and put the brakes on the yet-to-be-introduced legislation. He faced opposition from his fellow Democrat Legislators and angry voters throughout California.**

**The Los Angeles City Council is considering adopting an ordinance that would require a valet parking operator to obtain a permit, check employee's background and carry liability insurance. After a grace period, the new rules would go into effect in Hollywood and then be phased in throughout the rest of the city. Elements of the ordinance would be modeled after valet parking rules already in place in Beverly Hills, Santa Monica, Pasadena and West Hollywood. Critics of valet parking complain that fly-by-night valets have turned trusting souls into cynics by failing to cover damages to the vehicles or by lifting valuables from glove compartments.**

**In December, the CHP and various local police departments in California launched a crack down on drivers using hand held cell phones or other electronic communication devices. The effort was part of a \$600,000 test program, "Phone in One hand, Ticket in the Other", sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Safety Administration.**

**Commuters in the Bay Area could see parking lot costs triple at BART stations. The Bay Area Rapid Transit district is considering a proposal to raise parking fees incrementally as demand increases. Parking fees are now \$1 a day at most parking stations.**

## **COLORADO**

**A Colorado auditor's report suggests that curtailing emissions could save motorists \$30 million a year. The report says 93% of cars pass the test and questions whether the test is needed for air quality.**

## **D.C. WASHINGTON**

**The city plans to add 134 more traffic cameras in 2013, more than doubling its network of devices that generate tickets for speeding and running red lights. Traffic cameras generated a record \$85 million in revenue during the last fiscal year. I guess that they are not worried about going over the fiscal cliff!**

## **DELAWARE**

**The Office of Highway Safety reports that more than 1,800 drivers were cited for distracted driving during the Phone in one hand, Ticket in the Other Hand enforcement campaign Nov. 7-20**

## **GEORGIA**

**Macon City Councilman Frank Tompkins is proposing an ordinance to make it easier and safer for citizens to use wheelchairs and electric scooters on city roads. One rule would require scooters or**

wheelchairs to have reflectors or lights. He also wants the city to install plug-in stations to help keep the machines powered, the Macon Telegraph reports.

A state audit has found erroneous or incomplete information in the driver record system that puts Georgia at risk of losing \$30 million in federal highway funds. The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported that numerous courts either didn't report convictions involving traffic violations, drugs and stolen vehicles or are slow to report them.

## **ILLINOIS**

Chicago police issued 60 citations in the first week of a crackdown on people who park illegally in disability spaces. The crackdown was at shopping malls statewide during the holiday season.

On December 3<sup>rd</sup>, city officials began testing meant to catch speeders near schools and parks. Once the program is implemented, tickets start at \$35 for 6 to 10 mph over the speed limit and will reach \$100 for over 10 mph or more.

As of January 1<sup>st</sup>, vehicle owners started paying \$2 more for their license plates. Gov. Quinn approved a surcharge to help repair and maintain state parks. Basic license plates will be \$101 with the surcharge.

Tolls on the Chicago Skyway went from \$3.50 to \$4 on January 1<sup>st</sup>. The 8-mile stretch is run by the private Skyway Concessions Company, which has a 99 year lease with the city.

## **INDIANA**

Indianapolis wants to become the first major city to replace its entire fleet with electric and hybrid plug-in vehicles. Mayor Greg Ballard has signed an executive order mandating the city to replace its sedans with electric vehicles. The city fleet includes 500 non-police vehicles.

## **IOWA**

Transportation officials in Iowa City are taking a closer look at the use of traffic enforcement cameras, a move that may slow down plans to install the devices. The state Department of Transportation recently began requesting more traffic information about the cameras locations, including data about crash history, traffic and speed counts. City transportation planner, John Yapp, said collecting the new data could take until spring. An additional approval period from DOT means the cameras may go up a year later than expected. State approval isn't required for locally controlled roads.

The state Department of Transportation plans to print state road maps once every two years beginning in 2016, the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier reports.

## **KENTUCKY**

Louisville Metro police will no longer be able to pursue suspects in car chases unless the person is wanted for a violent felony. Police Chief Steve Conrad told the Courier-Journal he was making the

**revision to the department's policy in an effort to reduce the risk of collisions, which have killed eight people and injured 77 over the past five years.**

## **MARYLAND**

**A free application is available from the Motor Vehicle Administration that allows drivers to take a practice driving test using a smart phone.**

**A review is underway of the accuracy of the city's 83 speed cameras, which have generated complaints they are mistakenly ticketing drivers traveling under the speed limit. Chris Gilligan, spokesman for contractor Xerox, said the company believes the error is below 1%.**

## **MAINE**

**The Maine Bureau of Motor Vehicles has added three communities where motorist can renew driver's licenses at the local AAA branch. Following a successful pilot program in Waterville, the program expands to AAA branches in Portland, Bangor and Augusta.**

## **MISSOURI**

**A coalition is pushing for a non-stop highway from New Orleans to the border with Canada says the state's completion of its portion of the project should build momentum for Arkansas and Louisiana to finish their portions. A 180 mile stretch of U.S. 71 from Kansas City to Joplin was officially renamed U.S. 49 on Dec. 12<sup>th</sup>, marking completion of all but about 5 miles of Missouri's segment of the proposed route.**

## **MONTANA**

**A woman should be allowed to defend herself against a charge of driving under the influence by arguing someone put a date rape drug in her drink without her knowledge, the Montana Supreme Court has ruled. The 4-3 decision returned Leigh Pafthausen's case to Municipal Court, saying she should have the chance to offer evidence that her January 2010 intoxication was involuntary.**

## **NEBRASKA**

**Police in Lincoln recently installed street cameras at a busy downtown intersection to keep watch on rowdy patrons outside bars. Want to bet that motorists will not be ticketed for traffic violations caught on the cameras??**

## **NEVADA**

**Money from the sale of Lake Tahoe license plates is being offered to environmental and restoration projects in the Tahoe basin. The Nevada Division of State Land has about \$350,000 available to public agencies for capital improvements projects that further the Tahoe Regional Planning Agencies.**

## **NEW JERSEY**

**New Jersey's Senate has approved legislation that would require the state's E-Z Pass system to tell motorists how much is being deducted from their accounts at each toll. Supporters of the "Truth In Tolling Act" says it will eliminate the mystery about E-Pass charges.**

**Motorists began paying higher tolls on December 2<sup>nd</sup> at Port Authority bridges. Cash tolls on the George Washington Bridge, Holland Tunnel, Lincoln Tunnel, Goethals Bridge, Bayonne Bridge and Outerbridge Crossing increased \$1 to \$13. Tolls for E-Pass users increased 75 cents. The Port Authority last raised tolls in September 2011.**

**The Turnpike Authority's 2013 budget is lower than 2012, and it's attributable to pay concessions made by the toll collector's union for lower starting salaries and altered pay structure for part time toll collectors. The concessions were agreed to in April 2011 as a way to head off the prospect of privatizing toll collections.**

**In an effort to make the Garden State Parkway safer for young drivers, the Reinventing Safety 365 program calls for making state troopers more visible and using social media to explain to young motorists how driving on a toll road is different. Eleven of the 16 deaths on the Parkway this year involved drivers in their 20s.**

## **NORTH CAROLINA**

**A proposed tunnel under the Cape Fear River would cost \$700 million, Transportation Department chief of staff Bobby Lewis said. Another option is an addition to or replacement of the existing downtown bridge in Wilmington.**

**Transportation Secretary Onge said the states needs to raise nearly \$30 billion in new revenue during the next 20 years to pay for highway repairs, replacement of bridges and mass transit.**

## **NORTH DAKOTA**

**The 2013 vehicle permit for state parks recognizes the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Fort Ransom State Park "Sodbuster Days" event, which pays tribute to the state's pioneer ancestors.**

## **OHIO**

**Motorists disgruntled with parking fees??? Police in Cincinnati report that tops have been removed from 175 parking meters since June. Police have stepped up patrols, placed security cameras in some areas, and are asking citizens to report anyone damaging the meters.**

## **OREGON**

**The Oregon Department of Transportation is facing another \$90 million overrun to realign Hwy 20 through the coast range, and the agency says it could abandon a six mile stretch near Eddyville. The Department says more money is needed to stabilize hillsides to protect against landslides. The project has been plagued with cost overruns.**

**The state Department of Transportation has a plan to ease flooding on HWY 101 near Seaside and help the environment. The plan calls for removing a levee to create a wetland of more than 100 acres.**

## **RHODE ISLAND**

**State police kicked off their public awareness campaign ahead of New Years Eve to encourage safe, sober driving. The ‘365 Days of Safety’ campaign to make roads safer was a joint effort by law enforcement, federal and state transportation officials and community partners including Mothers Against Drunk Driving.**

## **SOUTH DAKOTA**

**Of 1,115 vehicles stolen over the past four years, 44 % were not recovered, the Argus Ledger reports. Most cars were stolen between 8 p.m. and 4 a.m. According to a survey by the National Insurance Association, only about 60% of stolen expensive vehicles stolen nationwide are ever recovered. Many stole expensive vehicles are shipped overseas where they sell for big money. Many foreign countries have a high import tax on legally imported expensive vehicles.**

## **TEXAS**

**Advocates for sobriety checkpoints want state lawmakers to crack down on drunk driving. Texas leads the nation in drunken-driving deaths, the Fort Worth Star-Telegram reports. Of the more than 10,000 people killed in alcohol related crashes nationwide in 2010, nearly 12% were in Texas. Sobriety checkpoints are allowed in 38 states but have been outlawed in Texas for nearly two decades.**

## **VIRGINIA**

**The state Department of transportation and the Navy have signed a deal that will allow work to connect the existing Interstate 564 through Navy Station Norfolk with Norfolk International terminals.**

## **WASHINGTON**

**Tow-truck operators in Seattle aren’t happy about efforts to cut fees. In a law suit filed in King County Superior Court, the Towing and Recovery Association argues the city can not adopt regulations inconsistent with state law regulating towing and impound fees. In September, the City council approved an ordinance to cap towing and impound fees.**

## **WISCONSIN**

**A citizen commission says state officials should raise the gas tax, impose mileage-based fees and increase registration and driver’s license fees to cover transportation needs. The 2011-2013 state budget created the commission to advise Gov. Walker on how to finance state transportation needs over the next decade.**

## WHAATSUUP HERE AND THERE

**Don't miss this chance to buy a one of a kind classic car. On Jan. 19<sup>th</sup>, at the Barrett-Jackson auction in Scottsdale, Az., the original Batmobile from the 1960's TV series will be auctioned off. The cars owner, famed auto customizer George Barris of Los Angles, transformed a one of a kind 1955 Lincoln Futura concept car into a sleek crime-fighting vehicle.**

**Watch that sneeze! CHP reports that on Nov. 29<sup>th</sup>, a sneezing fit caused a truck driver to crash into a dozen vehicles at an auto dealership in San Leandro, Ca. No one was injured, but 10 cars and trucks were damaged according to the CHP.**

**The League of American Bicyclists has added Eastern Mennonite to its list of Bicycle Friendly Universities. The University makes bike racks and storage areas available across the campus, has converted on-street parking into a bike lane, collects recyclable with a bike pulled trailer and has a bike co-op for repairs.**

**Most states have laws against hand held cellphone use or texting while driving, but one city in North Dakota has passed an ordinance against eating while driving.**

**According to a survey by the Allianz Travel Insurance Vacation Confidence Index, the car trip issues that people find most annoying are: Getting lost (26%), Backseat driver (22%) and frequent bathroom stops (15%).**

**Cities across Kansas's metro areas are facing millions of dollars in repairs to concrete structures installed years ago. The problem is concrete that's falling apart and appears to effect streets and curbs is called D-cracking and can be traced back to bad limestone that was used in the late 1980's. the Kansas City star reports.**

**Looking for Elvis?? Mississippi Tourism officials hope a new Graceland exhibit about Elvis Presley's boyhood will draw visitors to his birthplace in Tupelo. They visited the exhibit in Memphis, entitled Elvis' Tupelo. It showcases posters and memorabilia from every Tupelo Elvis Festival and a movie entitled Tupelo.**



Larry Becker  
December 27, 2012