

LEFT LANE SLOWPOKES FINED UNDER NEW VIRGINIA LAW

In May of last year, I wrote a “Did You Know” article on left lane hoggers frustrating other drivers and pointed out a particular state highway in Malone where this illegal practice occurs on a regular basis – East Main St. Road. What happens on this approximately one mile stretch of US Route 11, which is primarily four lanes wide, is that drivers move into or stay in the left lane the entire distance, knowing that when they get to the Brainairdsville Rd. driving east or to Raymond St. traveling west, they will be in the through lane.

NYS Vehicle and Traffic Law (VTL) section 1120 (b) is the law many violate. Basically, this law prohibits driving in the left lane at less than the normal speed of traffic. Thus, if a faster vehicle comes upon a vehicle in the left lane, the left lane hogger must return to the right lane or be in violation of the section of VTL. Of course, this law is most understood and obeyed when traveling on interstate highways, but it does also apply to other roads and highways including East Main St. Rd. in Malone.

This is not just a Malone problem. More states are moving to impose higher fines and additional restrictions for drivers who use the left lane on highways as a regular driving lane rather than for passing.

Beginning July 1, 2017, Virginia set a \$100 fine for driving too slowly in the left lane, failing to stay to the right side except when passing, and other violations. From July 1, 2017 through April 3, 2018, 1,951 citations were filed in general district courts across the state for failing to drive on the right half of the highway except when overtaking and passing another vehicle, according to data provided to WTOP by the Supreme Court of Virginia in response to a public records request. Among the cases that have been resolved, 623 people simply paid the \$100 fine without going to court, another 332 were found guilty, and 309 were found guilty in absentia.

Another 14,815 people were cited between July 1, 2017 and April 3 with the new \$100 fine under a broader section of the law that explicitly requires any vehicle going slower than the normal speed of traffic to stay to the right except when passing a vehicle or preparing for a left turn. This is almost identical to the existing law in New York.

According to the data provided, 5,327 people charged under that overall code section paid the new \$100 fine before a court date; 2,185 were found guilty; and 2,570 were found guilty in absentia.

In the nine months since Virginia passed the new law, a total of 16,766 drivers have been ticketed – that’s a lot of violations.

Other states have either enacted similar laws or are considering it. Backers cite the safety risks the practice causes as other drivers show frustration over having the left lane blocked and as they try to get around by shifting in and out of other lanes. And they say the practice impedes the smooth flow of traffic on crowded roads.

So, the next time you find yourself hogging the left lane, try using the right lane until close to where the right lane must turn right, and then move into the left lane.