

Sharing the Road

The State of Vermont's Guide

to shared use of the roadways
by motorists and cyclists



Proposed for use by either or both of the following:

Vermont Department of Motor Vehicles
Vermont Agency of Transportation

Sharing the Road in the State of Vermont

In Vermont as everywhere else, both motorists and cyclists must obey the laws governing the use of roads. As responsible users of the road, motorists and cyclists should treat each other with courtesy and caution, for the good of all parties concerned.

This brief manual is the Green Mountain Bicycle Club's guide to achieving these common goals by sharing the road. We urge that you give it your undivided attention, to ensure your own safety and the safety of others.

*Green Mountain Bicycle Club
Cycling Advocacy Committee*

Note: In the near future, this forward will hopefully be signed by the governor. It is our hope that the state will use this manual, possibly on the web, for training in safety courses for both motorists and cyclists.

The Law

All motorists and cyclists need a working knowledge of the laws governing the use of Vermont roads. First and foremost, motorists and cyclists are legally required to share the road.

Even though the bicycle is not legally defined as a vehicle in Vermont, a bicycle in traffic is still the *equivalent* a vehicle. Why? Because Vermont State law entitles cyclists who use the road to the same rights and responsibilities as motorists.

Car/Bike Collisions: Cause and Outcome

A typical automobile weighs in excess of 3,000 pounds. A bicycle weighs roughly one percent of this.

A motor vehicle is capable of speeds exceeding 60 miles per hour for extended periods on flat road. Only the most fit of cyclists can exceed 25 miles per hour for any extended period on flat road.

Collisions between bicycles and automobiles can result in serious injury to the cyclist, possibly even death. The motorist is seldom physically at risk in such a collision.

For these reasons, the automobile is a much

greater risk to a cyclist (and to other users of the road) than a cyclist is to an automobile.

A motorist involved in a car/bike collision can find the experience both demoralizing and financially costly. A cyclist involved in a collision can find it demoralizing, financially costly, and even deadly.

Actions by *motorists* that can contribute to collisions include:

- , Failing to notice the cyclist
- , Misjudging the cyclist's speed and/or direction
- , Traveling too fast
- , Failing to yield the right of way to a cyclist, when the cyclist has the right of way
- , Failing to slow down when driving into the sun, even though this condition makes other users of the road less visible

Actions by *cyclists* that can contribute to collisions include:

- , Running a stop sign or a red light.
- , Failing to obey other rules of the road – going against the flow of traffic is one of the more common violations
- , Weaving in and out of traffic
- , Using the road at night, without proper lighting

Riding so near the edge of the road as to not be in the area that a motorist normally scans

Harassment

The State of Vermont does not tolerate harassment on the road.

Harassment that involves both motorists and cyclists often begins verbally. In these potentially dangerous situations, it is important to not escalate matters.

This is true regardless of one individual's perception of possible wrong-doing on the part of the other individual. It is better to put up with petty annoyances than it is to risk breaking the law yourself. If you think the other individual is wrong, then report the situation to the proper authorities.

Never take matters into your own hands.

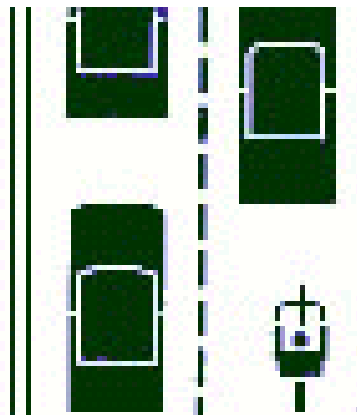
If you witness harassing behavior on the part of another user of the road, but are not directly involved, you are still encouraged to report the incident to the police.

If you are tempted to harass a fellow user of the road yourself, be aware that you are engaging in a criminal act. You may be subject to prosecution under Vermont

laws against harassment, assault, and/or reckless use of motor vehicles.

Where on the Road Should Cyclists Ride?

Cyclists should ride *with* the flow of traffic, and as far to the right as is practicable.



They should *not* ride so far to the right that they are difficult to see, however. This is particularly important in instances such as the following:

- , Turns in the road limit visibility.
- , Shadows from trees, buildings, or landscape darken the edge of the road.

In Vermont, cyclists have the legal right to ride two abreast, provided that such action does not impede motor vehicle traffic.

When Can a Cyclist Use the Whole Lane?

The cyclist can sometimes temporarily use the entire lane. This includes instances when:

- , Drivers behind the cyclist cannot see oncoming traffic.
- , The cyclist is making a lefthand turn.
- , The cyclist is crossing a busy intersection.

Specific instances will be outlined later in this guide, but the following should apply in all cases.

The Motorist:

Keep in mind that a courteous cyclist who "claims the lane" will pull to the right as soon as passing is safe.

The Cyclist:

Keep in mind that your use of the full lane is only temporary. When it is safe to be passed, you should move as far to the right as is practicable, given the width and condition of the road.

How Much Room Does a Cyclist Need to Be Safe?

A bicycle needs room to maneuver. The "three-meter rule" is a good guideline for both motorists and cyclists to keep in mind. This three-meter wide traveling space for the bicycle is the sum of the following parts:

- , A one-meter wide section of pavement directly in the pathway of the bicycle
- , A one-meter wide section of pavement to the *left* of the bicycle, and another one-meter wide section to the *right* of the bicycle, to allow for maneuvering around road hazards

How Should a Motorist Pass a Cyclist Under Normal Circumstances?

When a motorist is passing a cyclist, both parties should exercise good judgement.

The Motorist:

Pull to the left, away from the road's shoulder. Take care that there is adequate space between your vehicle and the bicycle.

If there is no oncoming traffic, use the lefthand lane, for additional safety. As you approach the center of the road, move by the cyclist.

If you use your horn to warn a cyclist of your

approach, do so when you are good distance behind the cyclist. Beeping when you are immediately behind can startle the cyclist, who may then swerve into harm's way.

The Cyclist:

Always make the effort to be aware that a motorist is passing.

Engine and/or tire sound is often your first warning that a motor vehicle is approaching from behind. For this reason, avoid distractions such as head phones.

You should maintain a steady line while being passed. Avoid any erratic behavior that might distract the motorist.

Intersections – In General

Whether you are a motorist or a cyclist, never use intersections as a place to pass.

STOP and YIELD signs must be heeded. While urban intersections tend to be much busier, rural intersections should also be approached with caution.

It is often safest for the cyclist to "claim the lane" at an intersection. This makes the cyclist more visible to drivers and allows more room to maneuver.

This also serves as a reminder to the motorist – wait until after the intersection to pass.

The Motorist:

Always be on the lookout for *all* users of the road, not just other motor vehicles. A cyclist may be harder to spot, but it is still your responsibility to see them.

Never assume that your motor vehicle has the right of way, simply because an approaching bicycle is smaller and slower.

At any intersection where you would yield right of way to another motor vehicle, you should also yield to an approaching bicycle.

The Cyclist:

Use the proper hand signals to make motorists aware of where you intend to go at an intersection:

Your smaller size makes you harder to notice. Try to wear bright clothing that makes you more visible.

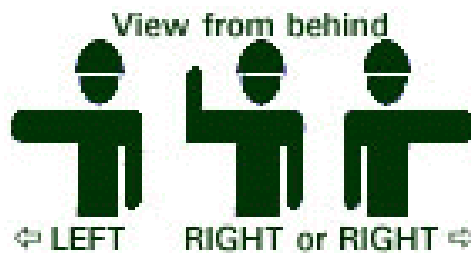
Remember, however, your lower speed and smaller size do not entitle you to run STOP signs, "RED" lights, or YIELD signs.

Intersections – Motorist Overtaking Cyclist, Then Turning Right

The Motorist:

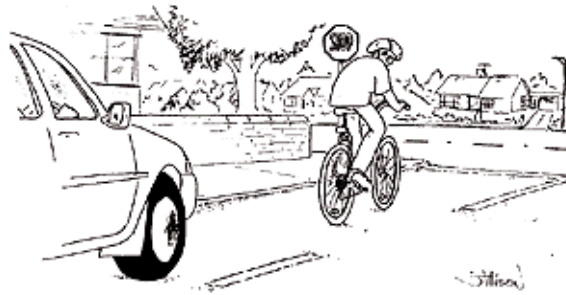
Don't pass a cyclist immediately before you intend to make a right-hand turn. Instead, slow down and wait until the cyclist is through the intersection. Then make your turn.

If you fail to do this, you risk putting yourself directly in the cyclist's path. This is one of the more common causes of car/bike collisions.



The Cyclist:

If you are near an intersection and a motor vehicle overtakes you from behind, be alert. Even if you are going straight, be ready to turn right yourself, to avoid a possible collision.



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the motorist to see a cyclist who is *beside* them. Avoid
this situation.

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Intersections – Motorist and Cyclist Both Turning Right

When the cyclist and the motorist are both turning right, they should not travel side-by-side. This makes it more difficult for each to see the other.

Intersections – Cyclist Turning Left

The Motorist:

A cyclist who moves to the left side of your lane for a left-hand turn is obeying the rules of the road.

Never pass a moving bicycle on the right, unless:

- , The bicycle is fully stopped (the same rule applies when you are overtaking a motor vehicle that is turning left).
- , You are in the left lane on a multiple lane road, and the right lane is free for you to use to pass.

The Cyclist:

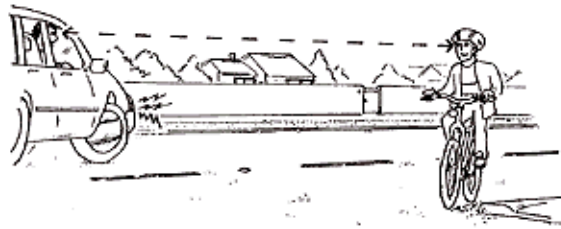
Begin your left turn signal well before the actual turn. Check behind for traffic. When it is safe to do so, make your way to the left.

You should be in the left lane or near the center line by the time you reach the turn. Yield to any oncoming traffic.

Intersections – Motor Vehicle Turning Left

If you are a motorist who is about to turn left at an intersection, you should remember to yield to any oncoming traffic, whether it be car, bicycle, or other.

If you are a cyclist and a motorist in the oncoming lane is signaling for a left turn, try to establish eye contact:



Be prepared for the possibility that the motorist may not notice you.

Bridges

Bridges can be especially hazardous when used simultaneously by cyclists and motorists. This is especially true in instances where there is oncoming traffic. If something unexpected occurs on a bridge, there is no escape route.

The Motorist:

If you don't have room to pass a cyclist safely, wait until the cyclist crosses the bridge before passing.

The Cyclist:

Always check behind for traffic as you approach a

bridge. If the bridge lane is clearly not wide enough for passing, do you feel comfortable with "claiming the lane"?

If not, your safest alternative may be to pull over and wait until there is no traffic.

Always look ahead for hazards such as:

- , Expansion joints
- , Edge traps
- , Longitudinal ruts
- , Lateral ruts
- , Wooden or metal bridges, especially when wet

Mountain Highways

A number of Vermont highways have significant climbs and drops. Hilly or mountainous roads can be narrow and more prone to tight "hairpin" turns.

On mountain highways, motorists and cyclists tend to travel at a wider range of speeds than on the flats. Bicycles are capable of exceeding 50 miles per hour on descents. Whether you are a motorist or a cyclist, be especially alert for any oncoming traffic.

Mountain Highways: Ascending

The Motorist:

When overtaking a cyclist who is climbing, allow extra space to pass – the cyclist's lower speed makes them less stable than on level pavement. If there isn't room to pass safely, wait until there is.

The Cyclist:

Climb in a straight line. Zig-zagging makes a steep climb a little easier on the legs, but puts you much more at risk for a collision.

Mountain Highways: Descending

The Motorist:

When overtaking a cyclist who is descending, check your speed before taking any further action. Any attempt to pass a bicycle moving at or near the posted speed limit can:

- , Endanger the cyclist
- , Endanger oncoming traffic (as well as yourself)

You should not pass a descending cyclist when the road curves, especially when such curves are marked for reduced speed.

The Cyclist:

If you are approaching the legal speed limit while descending, you may find it safest to use the entire lane. As the road levels, your speed decreases. Once the road is straight enough to see oncoming traffic and side roads, move to the right.

Getting on or off the Road: In General

Vermont state law requires that a motorist enter a state highway by driving *forward*. This makes it simpler (and safer) for a motorist to see cyclists, pedestrians, and other motor vehicles.

This law applies whether the motorist is coming out of any of the following:

- , A private drive (home driveways, for example)
- , An alley
- , A parking space
- , Other

Whether you are a motorist or a cyclist, if you are entering any public road from any of the preceding, remember that users of the road have the right of way.

If you are a user of the road, you should always be alert for children. This is especially true when you are approaching a driveway. A child (often a small one) can unexpectedly dart out in front of you on a bicycle, a tricycle, a toy vehicle,

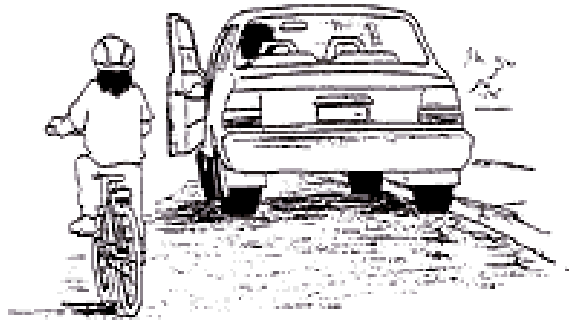
or on foot.

Getting on or off the Road: Parking Spaces

Parking spaces have their own specific hazards. Users of the road and drivers of parked (or parking) vehicles should be aware of the following cautions.

The Motorist:

If you have just parked, you and your passengers should check carefully for cyclists approaching from behind, as well as for other motor vehicles. Do not open your roadside doors until the road is clear.



If you are about to pull out of a parking space, take extra care to check for cyclists on the road. They are harder to spot than motor vehicles.

Do not pass a cyclist immediately before you pull into parking space. Always slow down and wait for the

cyclist to go by first.

The Cyclist:

Ride far enough out in your lane to:

- , Avoid a car door that has opened, without swerving into the path of the traffic behind you
- , Be visible to motorists approaching you from behind
- , Be visible to pedestrians

Pedestrians

Both cyclists and motorists are legally required to yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk. While it is preferred that pedestrians use crosswalks, this is not always practicable. You should still be sure you yield to someone who is crossing the road on foot.

Always be alert for pedestrians walking at the side of the road, parallel to the line of traffic. This is especially true in areas where there are no sidewalks.

Cyclists and Sidewalks

Sidewalks are usually designated primarily for the use of pedestrians.

There are areas in some towns in Vermont where cyclists are prohibited by law from using sidewalks. This is particularly likely in urban areas. In these instances, any cyclist who wishes to use a sidewalk needs to dismount and proceed on foot.

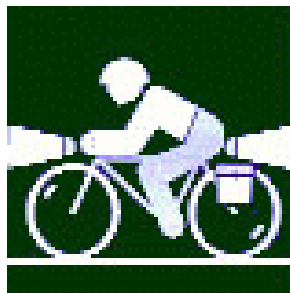
A cyclist who wishes to use a crosswalk to cross the road, needs to become a pedestrian. The cyclist should walk their bike across, instead of riding it.

Using Lights on the Road at Night

All users of the road are required to use lights at night.

Cyclists should be aware, reflectors are *not adequate* for allowing motorists to see you after dark. Your bike shop can help you find lighting systems that will make riding at night safer.

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Road

The #1 cause of death in cycling accidents is head injury. Many of these fatalities could have been prevented, had the cyclist worn a proper helmet.

All bicycle helmets are "single impact" – *the helmet saves your head by absorbing the impact itself*. While your helmet may seem to suffer only a few scratches in an accident, never continue to use a single impact helmet after a crash. Always replace it.

Proper bicycle helmets are tested and approved. A helmet's approval label (see the inside of the helmet) is provided by professionals who are independent of the helmet's manufacturer. The labels to look for are the B90 series, by the Snell Institute, or the ANSI label.

Your best source of additional information on helmets is a good bicycle shop. They will help you to find a helmet that is affordable and effective, and that fits properly.

Always use your helmet when you ride, and always wear it correctly. Don't allow the helmet to slope forward or back. It should protect your forehead, as well as the back of your head:



The material used in a good bicycle helmet will deteriorate over time (three to five years, according to different manufacturers). Be sure and replace a helmet that has worn out in this way.

Sanctioned Bicycle Races on Vermont Roads

On occasion, Vermont allows the use of its roads for officially sanctioned bicycle races.

When a motorist overtakes such an event, they may find the entire lane ahead occupied by a large group of closely-bunched cyclists, called a "pack". This pack can move at speeds approaching or even exceeding 30 miles per hour on *flat* terrain.

Motorists and cyclists each have a few additional responsibilities during these events.

The Motorist:

You should treat any group of bicycle racers as if it is a *single large vehicle*. While it may not be moving as fast as you are, you should slow down and wait until you can safely pass all the racers at once.

The Cyclist:

When you race, you should remember that you are still sharing the road. Do *not* cross the center line into the oncoming traffic lane, unless the race course is entirely closed to traffic.

Organized Tours on Vermont Roads

Organized tours proceed at a more moderate pace than races, but like races, they can involve large groups of cyclists. Motorists and cyclists each have a few additional responsibilities during such tours.

The Motorist:

You should treat any closely bunched group of touring cyclists as if it is a *single large vehicle*. You should slow down and wait until you can safely pass the entire bunch.

The Cyclist:

Unlike a sanctioned race, you cannot ride more than two abreast when touring. It is helpful to stagger your tour, riding in small groups that are widely spaced. This

facilitates motorists passing, and reduces the danger of collision.

Summary

By consistently following the practices outlined in this guide, motorist and cyclists can both help to ensure a safer and more enjoyable roadway for all.

Suggested Reading

ALLEN, JOHN S. *Street Smarts: Bicycling's Traffic Survival Guide*, Rodale Press, 1995.

BELL, TRUDY, *The Essential Bike Commuter*, McGraw-Hill, 1997.

FORESTER, JOHN *Effective Cycling*, The M.I.T. Press, (Sixth Edition 1994).

GLOWACZ, DAVE, *Urban Biker's Trip and Tips*, Wordspace Press, 1997.