

Handy guide for cyclists

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Introduction

With few exceptions, bicyclists on public roadways have the same rights and responsibilities as automobile drivers, and are subject to the same state laws and local ordinances.

It is imperative that we cyclists hold up our end of the bargain. Bicycling is beneficial for personal health, and when used instead of a car as transit to town or country it is beneficial to our environment. Many people are working hard to improve bicycling conditions.... We will not succeed if mannerless cycling is the norm.

Bicyclists need to show respect to get respect. We hope that you will make it a point to ride as an ambassador of cycling. If you have friends who ride as if no one else mattered, do bicyclists everywhere a favor by trying to talk them down from bogus rationalizations.

Ride responsibly and courteously

- Never ride against traffic
- Stop at stop signs & red lights
- Use hand signals
- Be predictable; don't weave
- Honor others' right of way
- Ride as far right as practicable, i.e., as far left as necessary to be safe
- Follow lane markings
- Use lights at night

Safety priorities

• Control your bike: don't fall or collide with others

About half of cyclist crashes are single-rider falls. If you can control your bike skillfully (starting, signaling, stopping, turning smoothly) you will not fall down or run into pedestrians, other cyclists, animals or objects.

• Follow the rules of the road

For adult cyclists, about half of car-bike collisions are caused by cyclists who make unsafe choices/decisions. Follow traffic laws, obey signs and signals, and use correct lanes for turns and through movements so that you don't cause a collision.

• Position yourself correctly to discourage other drivers' mistakes

Unsafe decisions by motor vehicle drivers cause about half of car-bike crashes for adult cyclists. Know when to control the lane and when to share it. Use your lane position to let all drivers know what you are doing and discourage them from cutting you off.

- **Avoid hazards**

Be aware of what is going on around you at all times. Learn and practice emergency maneuvers to avoid crashing—and/or to limit consequences of a collision or crash.

- **Use protective equipment to reduce chances of serious injury**

If all else fails, make sure you are wearing your protective layers: helmet and gloves. Think of these as the seat belt and air bags in a car.

Principles of traffic law: be predictable

Following the basic principles of traffic law will help you understand how to ride your bicycle in any traffic situation. Complying with traffic law principles decrease the likelihood of conflicts and collisions, and can make your ride more enjoyable.

- **Bicycling in traffic**

As a bicyclist, you are recognized as a legal driver of a vehicle in all states. Therefore, drive your bicycle as you would any vehicle. Obey all traffic laws, signs and signals.

- **Drive on the right-hand side of the roadway**

In most countries, drivers of vehicles, including bicyclists, must drive on the right-hand side of the roadway. ***Don't ride against traffic.*** Motorists are not looking for bicyclists riding on the wrong side of the road. Traveling against traffic puts you in positions on the road where other drivers do not expect you, and makes it impossible to read signs and signals. Be predictable to all road users; never be a wrong-way rider. Many common crash types result from going against the flow.

- **First come, first served**

Vehicles are entitled to the lane width they need, with reasonable clearance behind and to each side—and with reasonable stopping distance in front of them. All drivers must yield before moving into space occupied by vehicles that are there first.

- **Yield to crossing traffic**

Drivers on minor roads, including driveways and alleys, yield (give right of way) to traffic on more major roads. Proceed onto a roadway only when it is safe to do so, and obey all traffic control devices: signs, signals and markings.

- **Hand signals**

Use hand signals to tell other road users what you intend to do. Signal as a matter of law, courtesy, and self-protection.

- **Positioning rules**

Always ride in the rightmost lane that the normal flow of traffic follows to your destination. If a bike lane is provided and takes you safely to your destination, ride within it (but *not* in the door zone). **Ride in a straight line**; don't weave between parked cars. Motorists may not see

you when you try to move back into traffic. Ride to the right edge of the road when traveling slower than the speed of traffic and when safe to do so, with the following exceptions:

- **Wide lanes (safely shareable):** Ride just to the right of motorized traffic.
- **Narrow lanes (too narrow to share):** Ride in the center of the lane, or just to the right of center.
- **Door zone:** When riding along parked cars, ride outside the area where doors can open into your path.
- **Speed positioning.** If traveling at the speed of traffic, control the entire lane (“take the lane”).
- **Overtaking:** If traveling faster than other traffic, overtake on the left, keeping a safe distance from slower traffic, except when the vehicle ahead is turning left, or on multi-lane roads.
- **Intersections:** If there is only a single lane, approach intersections in the proper position: right turners next to the curb; left turners near the center line; straight-through drivers between these positions. When there are multiple lanes, *travel according to lane markings*. Don’t turn left from the right lane; don’t go straight in a lane marked “**RIGHT TURN ONLY**”.
- **Choose the best way to turn left.** There are at least two ways to make a left turn. (1) Like an auto: signal, scan back, move into the left turn lane, and turn left. (2) Like a pedestrian: if you are within a designated crosswalk, dismount and **walk** your bike across.

• Changing lanes safely

Drivers who want to move laterally on the roadway must yield to traffic in their new line of travel. Move only after scanning behind to see that no traffic is coming and looking in front to see that the way ahead is clear.

Cyclists are legitimate users of the roadways. A cyclist needs to have this attitude as well as the necessary knowledge and skills. Be confident and assertive, but not reckless. In order to change lanes successfully in traffic...

- Plan ahead
- Look behind, more than once
- Signal your intention, negotiating as necessary
- Act carefully, smoothly and deliberately
- Never move in front of another vehicle so close as to constitute a hazard

How to change lanes depends on your speed relative to the speed of traffic. When the surrounding traffic is moving at least as fast as

you are, but not more than 15 miles per hour faster, negotiate with overtaking motorists and make two moves per lane.

Courtesy & common sense

Obey all traffic devices

Stop at stop signs/lights: Stop at all stop signs and red lights.

If two vehicles arrive at an intersection at the same time, the vehicle on the right has the right of way. Pedestrians *always* have the right of way. Your courtesy will be noticed and appreciated by other road users.

Group riding: When riding with others, be aware of other road users at all times. When stopping for a stop sign in a group, queue up in small numbers and proceed when it is your turn, allowing other road users their right of way. Cross the intersection as safely and quickly as possible without testing the patience of other road users. Self-policing and courteous riding will go far.

Children: If children ride with you, remember that youngsters under the age of nine generally lack the physical and mental development to interact safely in a complex traffic environment.

Be equipped

Be visible. Wear light or bright-colored clothing.

Ride a well-equipped bike. Be sure your bike is adjusted to fit you properly and is equipped for your needs. (gearing, racks, panniers/baskets, fenders, etc.).

Keep your bike in good repair. Maintain your bike in good working condition. Perform the ABC Quick Check regularly and keep tires inflated properly. Learn to do routine maintenance yourself, or take it to the experts at your local bike shop.

Use good lights at night. Front light, rear reflectors, wheel and pedal reflectors are required. The front light must be visible from 300 feet. Use a rear red light for enhanced visibility. Wear light-colored or reflective clothing.

Wear a helmet when you ride. Wear helmets that comply with the latest national standards. Bike helmets may need to be replaced after a fall. All youths 18 and under *must* wear a bicycle helmet when operating a bicycle or when riding as a passenger. Set a good example for youngsters.

Be alert

Watch for right-turning traffic. Motorists turning right may not notice cyclists on their right. Watch for any indication

that a motorist may turn into your path. When approaching intersections try to stay far enough from the curb to allow cars to turn right on your right.

Look back [scan] before you pass or merge. Leave a good 3–4 feet when passing a pedestrian or another bicyclist. A rear-view mirror is a good idea, but don't rely on it alone.

Respect pedestrian rights. Pedestrians have the right of way. Don't cross sidewalks via driveways without yielding to pedestrians. Don't ride on sidewalks. Use the street, bike lane, or bike path. Give a warning: use a bike bell, or call out "Passing on your left".

Keep both hands ready to brake. You may not stop in time if you brake one-handed. Allow extra distance for stopping in rain; brakes are less efficient when wet.

Avoid hazards. Watch for parked car doors opening. Watch for railroad tracks and cross them at a 90° angle. Avoid parallel-slat sewer grates, manhole covers, oily pavement, sand, gravel, potholes—all are hazardous, especially when wet.

Parking your bike

Park considerately. Bicycle parking should not interfere with pedestrian and vehicle movements. Use bike racks properly.

Lock your bike. Buy an appropriate lock and use it correctly. Keep a record of your bike serial number. Should your bike be stolen, report the serial number and description of your bike to the police department.

California Drivers Handbook 2006

Right of Way Rules (p. 15–17)

General Information

Right-of-way rules help people drive safely. These rules go along with courtesy and common sense. *Bicyclists, moped riders, and pedestrians must follow these rules, too.*

Pedestrians

A pedestrian is a person on foot or who uses a conveyance such as roller skates, skateboards, etc., other than a bicycle. A pedestrian can also be a person with a disability on a tricycle or quadricycle or in a self-propelled wheelchair.

Always stop for any pedestrian crossing at corners or other crosswalks. Do not pass a car from behind that has stopped at a crosswalk. A pedestrian you can't see may be crossing.

Do not drive on a sidewalk, except to cross it at a driveway or alley. When crossing, yield to any pedestrian.

Pedestrians have the right of way at corners with or without traffic lights, whether or not the crosswalks are marked by painted white lines.

Allow older pedestrians more time to cross the street.

Crosswalks

Every intersection has a pedestrian crosswalk whether or not there are painted lines on the street. Most crosswalks are at corners but they can also be in the middle of the block. Before turning a corner, watch for people about to cross the street. ***Pedestrians have the right of way in crosswalks.***

Traffic Signal Lights (p. 18–19)

Solid red. A red signal light means “**STOP.**” You can make a right turn against a red light after you stop and yield to pedestrians, bicyclists, and vehicles that are close enough to be a hazard. Make the right turn only when it is safe. Do not turn if a “**NO TURN ON RED**” sign is posted.

Red arrow. A red arrow means “**STOP.**” Remain stopped until the green signal or green arrow appears. Do not turn against a red arrow.

Flashing red. A flashing red signal light means “**STOP.**” After stopping, you may proceed when it is safe. Observe the right-of-way rules.

Solid green. A green light means “**GO**” but first give the right of way to any vehicle, bicyclist, or pedestrian in the intersection. If you are turning left, make the turn only if you have enough space to complete the turn before any oncoming vehicle, bicyclist, or pedestrian becomes a hazard. Do not enter the intersection if you cannot get completely across before the light turns red. If you block the intersection, you can be cited.

Traffic signal blackout. If a traffic signal light is not working, proceed as if the intersection is controlled by a stop sign in all directions.

SPEED LIMITS (p. 20)

California has a “Basic Speed Law.” This law means you may never drive faster than is safe for current conditions.

BICYCLE LANES (p. 24–25)

A bicycle lane is shown by a solid white line along either side of the street, four or more feet from the curb. The white line will usually be broken near the corner and the words “**BIKE LANE**” will be painted in the lane. When you are making a right turn and are within 200 feet of the corner or other driveway entrance, you must enter the bike lane for the turn. [Motorists:] Do not drive in the bike lane at any other time.

[Vehicles] may park in a bike lane unless a “**No Parking**” sign is posted.

Pedestrians are not allowed in bike lanes when sidewalks are available. Drivers of motorized bicycles should use bike lanes carefully to avoid accidents with bicyclists.

BICYCLES (p. 54)

Bicyclists on public streets have the same rights and responsibilities as automobile drivers. Bicyclists are part of the normal traffic flow and are entitled to share the road with other drivers. Here are some critical points for drivers and cyclists to remember:

• *Bicyclists:*

- must ride in the same direction as other traffic, not against it.
- must ride in a straight line as near to the right curb or edge of the roadway as practical—not on the sidewalk.
- must make left and right turns in the same way that drivers do, using the same turn lanes.
- may legally move left to turn left, to pass a parked or moving vehicle, another bicycle, an animal, or to make a turn, avoid debris, or other hazards.
- may choose to ride near the left curb or edge of one-way street.
- may use a left turn lane. If the bicyclist is traveling straight ahead, he or she should use a through traffic lane rather than ride next to the curb and block traffic making right turns.
- are lawfully permitted to ride on certain sections of freeways, when signs are posted. Be careful when approaching or passing a bicyclist on a freeway.

• *Drivers must:*

- look carefully for bicyclists before opening doors next to moving traffic or before turning right.
- safely merge toward the curb or into the bike lane.
- not overtake a bicyclist just before making a right turn. Merge first, then turn

Latest version is downloadable from www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/pubs.htm.

Motorist etiquette regarding bicyclists

Two common misconceptions of motorists: assuming that roads were built for cars only, and that bicyclists do not pay their way.

Public roads are for shared use

Since the inception of the “Good Roads” campaign by the League of American Wheelmen (now the League of American Bicyclists) in the 1890s, public roads across the land have been for shared use. The League’s lobbying paved the way for cars. Today, laws are still clear that roads are for **all** users. On roadways, might doesn’t constitute right.

Remember...

“Cyclists fare best when they act and are treated as drivers of vehicles.”

— John Forester

San Luis Obispo Municipal Code

10.04.180 Stop

“STOP”, when required, means complete cessation of movement.

10.72 Bicycles

10.72.100 Riding on sidewalks prohibited.

No person shall ride a bicycle upon any sidewalk (Ord. 974 § 1)

California Vehicle Code excerpts

From sections 21200–21212 and 22111 for cyclists

For full text, see http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/vctop/vc/vc_index_b.htm

21200 [Rights and responsibilities]

(a) Every person riding a bicycle upon a highway has all the rights and is subject to all the provisions applicable to the driver of a vehicle....

21200.5 Notwithstanding Section 21200, it is unlawful for any person to ride a bicycle upon a highway while under the influence of an alcoholic beverage or any drug, or under the combined influence of an alcoholic beverage and any drug.

21201 [Equipment required]

(a) No person shall operate a bicycle on a roadway unless it is equipped with a brake which will enable the operator to make one braked wheel skid on dry, level, clean pavement.

(b) No person shall operate on the highway any bicycle equipped with handlebars so raised that the operator must elevate his hands above the level of his shoulders in order to grasp the normal steering grip area [i.e., “ape bars”].

(c) No person shall operate upon any highway a bicycle which is of such a size as to prevent the operator from safely stopping the bicycle, supporting it in an upright position with at least one foot on the ground, and restarting it in a safe manner.

(d) [**Lighting**] Every bicycle operated upon any highway during darkness shall be equipped (1) with a lamp emitting a white light which, while the bicycle is in motion, illuminates the highway in front of the bicyclist and is visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle; (2) with a red reflector on the rear which shall be visible from a distance of 500 feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful upper beams of headlamps on a motor vehicle; (3) with a white or yellow reflector on each pedal visible from the front and rear of the bicycle from a distance of 200 feet; and (4) with a white

or yellow reflector on each side forward of the center of the bicycle, and with a white or red reflector on each side to the rear of the center of the bicycle, except that bicycles which are equipped with reflectorized tires on the front and the rear need not be equipped with these side reflectors. Such reflectors and reflectorized tires shall be of a type meeting requirements established by the department.

- (e) A lamp or lamp combination, emitting a white light, attached to the operator and visible from a distance of 300 feet in front and from the sides of the bicycle, may be used in lieu of the lamp required by clause (1) of subdivision (d).

21202 [Where to ride; position on the roadway]

- (a) Any person operating a bicycle upon a roadway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction at that time shall ride *as close as practicable* to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway **except** under any of the following situations:

- (1) When **overtaking and passing** another bicycle or vehicle proceeding in the same direction.

- (2) When **preparing for a left turn** at an intersection or into a private road or driveway.

- (3) When reasonably necessary to avoid conditions (including, but not limited to, fixed or moving objects, vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, animals, surface hazards, or substandard width lanes) that make it unsafe to continue along the right-hand curb or edge, subject to the provisions of Section 21656. For purposes of this section, a “substandard width lane” is a lane that is too narrow for a bicycle and a vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane.

- (4) When approaching a place where a right turn is authorized.

- (b) Any person operating a bicycle upon a roadway of a highway, which highway carries traffic in one direction only [one-way] and has two or more marked traffic lanes, may ride as near the left-hand curb or edge of that roadway as **practicable**.

21204 [Passengers]

- (a) No person operating a bicycle upon a highway shall ride other than upon or astride a permanent and regular seat attached thereto.
- (b) No operator shall allow a person riding as a passenger, and no person shall ride as a passenger, on a bicycle upon a highway other than upon or astride a separate seat attached thereto. If the passenger is four years of age or younger, or weighs

40 pounds or less, the seat shall have adequate provision for retaining the passenger in place and for protecting the passenger from the moving parts of the bicycle.

21205 [Control of bicycle]

No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle or article which prevents the operator from keeping at least one hand upon the handlebars.

21207 [Bike lanes and other bikeways]

- (a) This chapter does not prohibit local authorities from establishing, by ordinance or resolution, bicycle lanes separated from any vehicular lanes upon highways, other than state highways as defined in Section 24 of the Streets and Highways Code and county highways
- (b) Bicycle lanes established pursuant to this section shall be constructed in compliance with Section 891 of the Streets and Highways Code.

21207.5 Notwithstanding Sections 21207 and 23127 of this code, or any other provision of law, no motorized bicycle may be operated on a bicycle path or trail, bikeway, bicycle lane established pursuant to Section 21207, equestrian trail, or hiking or recreational trail, unless it is within or adjacent to a roadway or unless the local authority or the governing body of a public agency having jurisdiction over such path or trail permits, by ordinance, such operation.

21208 [Bike lane use requirements]

- (a) Whenever a bicycle lane has been established on a roadway pursuant to Section 21207, any person operating a bicycle upon the roadway at a speed less than the normal speed of traffic moving in the same direction at that time shall ride within the bicycle lane, except that the person may move out of the lane under any of the following situations:
 - (1) When overtaking and passing another bicycle, vehicle, or pedestrian within the lane or about to enter the lane if the overtaking and passing cannot be done safely within the lane.
 - (2) When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway.
 - (3) When reasonably necessary to leave the bicycle lane to avoid debris or other hazardous conditions.
 - (4) When approaching a place where a right turn is authorized.
- (b) No person operating a bicycle shall leave a bicycle lane until the movement can be made with reasonable safety and then only after giving an appropriate signal in the manner provided

in Chapter 6 (commencing with Section 22100) in the event that any vehicle may be affected by the movement.

21209 [Motor vehicles in bicycle lanes]

- (a) No person shall drive a motor vehicle in a bicycle lane established on a roadway pursuant to Section 21207 except as follows:
 - (1) To park where parking is permitted.
 - (2) To enter or leave the roadway.
 - (3) To prepare for a turn within a distance of 200 feet from the intersection.
- (b) This section does not prohibit the use of a motorized bicycle in a bicycle lane, pursuant to Section 21207.5, at a speed no greater than is reasonable or prudent, having due regard for visibility, traffic conditions, and the condition of the roadway surface of the bicycle lane, and in a manner which does not endanger the safety of bicyclists.

21210 [Bicycle parking]

No person shall leave a bicycle lying on its side on any sidewalk, or shall park a bicycle on a sidewalk in any other position, so that there is not an adequate path for pedestrian traffic. ...

21211 [Class I bikeway rules]

- (a) No person shall stop, stand, sit, or loiter upon any class I bikeway, as defined in subdivision (a) of Section 890.4 of the Streets and Highways Code, or any other public or private bicycle path or trail, if the stopping, standing, sitting, or loitering impedes or blocks the normal and reasonable movement of any bicyclist.
- (b) No person shall place or park any bicycle, vehicle, or any other object upon any bikeway or bicycle path or trail, as specified in subdivision (a), which impedes or blocks the normal and reasonable movement of any bicyclist unless the placement or parking is necessary for safe operation or is otherwise in compliance with the law.
- (c) This section does not apply to drivers or owners of utility or public utility vehicles, as provided in Section 22512.
- (d) This section does not apply to owners or drivers of vehicles who make brief stops while engaged in the delivery of newspapers to customers along the person's route.

21212 [Helmets]

- (a) A person under 18 years of age shall not operate a bicycle, or ride upon a bicycle as a passenger, upon a street, bikeway, as defined in Section 890.4 of the Streets and Highways Code,

or any other public bicycle path or trail unless that person is wearing a properly fitted and fastened bicycle helmet that meets the [current] standards ... [see <http://www.helmets.org/standard.htm>].

22111 [Hand signals]

All required signals given by hand and arm shall be given from the left side of a vehicle in the following manner:

- (a) Left turn—hand and arm extended horizontally beyond the side of the vehicle.
- (b) Right turn—hand and arm extended upward beyond the side of the vehicle, except that a bicyclist may extend the right hand and arm horizontally to the right side of the bicycle.
- (c) Stop or sudden decrease of speed signal—hand and arm extended downward beyond the side of the vehicle.

BICYCLES [full text of codes affecting bicyclists]

http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/vctop/vc/vc_index_b.htm

Generally, 21200–21210; 39000–39009; 39011	Equipment, 21201
Carrying of articles, 21205	Fees, 39001; 39004
Change of address, 39009	Fines, 39011
Dealer defined, 39006	Freeway, use on, 21960
Defined, 231; 21200; 39000	Helmets, 21212
Direction ridden, 21650.1	

For other states and countries

See <http://www.massbike.org/bikelaw/index.htm>

Contributors

Many thanks to those who contributed their ideas and insight to this booklet: Joe Breeze, Marin County Bicycle Coalition; League Cycling Instructors (LCIs) Fred Oswald, Kevin Christian, Dan Guttierrez, Preston Tyree, and others at the League of American Bicyclists (LAB).

For more information about the Marin County Bicycle Coalition, see www.marinbike.org/Campaigns/ShareTheRoad/EtiquetteIntro.htm

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