

DID YOU KNOW???

SHARING LANES WITH BICYCLES

A series of Did You Know articles recently explained vehicle and traffic laws for motorists, pedestrians, and bicyclists and how to work together safely. This week's article reveals more detail as to how motorists are required to share roads with bicyclists.

As a motorist, whether you agree or not, NYS vehicle and traffic law (VTL) gives bicyclists just as much right to use our streets, roads and highways (except for interstate highways and certain expressways) as do drivers of motor vehicles. As previously explained, a bicyclist is required to use a designated bike lane if available (none in Franklin County that I'm aware of). Absent a bike lane, cyclists should use a shoulder if available. But what if the road is a two-lane road with little or no shoulder? What if it is a village street with parking, and the drive lane isn't wide enough for a vehicle to safely pass a bicyclist? What if there are road hazards like debris in the road, catch basins or pot holes that bicyclists need to avoid? What if a bicyclist wants to make a left turn?

In all of the above mentioned examples, the bicycle rider has the legal right to "take the lane", meaning he/she may actually ride in the center of the driving lane, which would preclude any vehicle coming upon the rider from behind from passing until it becomes safe to do so. This may require the motorist to wait until there are no oncoming vehicles, and then pass the bicyclist safely by moving into the oncoming lane.

In NYS, there are signs (see picture) that may be installed to warn motorists that bicyclists may be within the lane and to alert motorists that the lane is too narrow to share with a bicyclist; drivers therefore must leave the lane to safely pass a bicyclist. Guidance as to when and where these signs may be used is spelled out in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices and in the NYS Supplement to the national manual. These include streets/roads/highways where the usable width of the right lane is less than 14 feet, and thus does not allow motorists and bicyclists to safely travel side-by-side within the lane.



Several of these signs have been installed in the Malone area recently, including the Junction Rd., Houndsville Rd., Town Line Rd., and others. Shared-Lane pavement markings, sometimes referred to as "sharrows", may supplement the Bicycle sign plus the IN LANE plaque where the speed limit is 35 mph or less and the usable width of the right lane is less than 14 feet where parking is not allowed, or is less than 26 feet where parking is allowed. This gives bicyclists enough width to ride far enough from parked cars to avoid being "doored" by a careless driver exiting his/her vehicle.

When a bicyclist is preparing for a left turn, they may move to the center of the lane to prevent a following motorist from sharing the lane. They should use hand signals before making any turn [VTL, section 1237].

As a driver, please be aware of the legal rights that bicyclists have and drive in a safe manner in their presence. And to bike riders, you must follow the same laws that motorists do. To everyone, drive, ride, or walk responsibly – it's good for your longevity.