

DID YOU KNOW???

SHARING THE ROAD WITH CYCLISTS – THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW

With spring, bike riding time is here (actually thousands ride year-round in bigger cities like Montreal, Ottawa & Toronto), but far too many bike riders are not obeying the laws designed to make riding safer and far too many drivers don't know applicable traffic laws that apply to them when approaching/passing a cyclist.

First, and most important, bicycles, by law, have just as much right to use our streets and roads as do motor vehicles. However, cyclists are also required by law to obey the same laws that apply to drivers, like stopping for pedestrians in a crosswalk, and obeying all traffic signals, signs and pavement markings. This includes stopping for stop signs and red traffic signals, which an incredible number of cyclists seem to ignore. Bicycles are required by law to **ride on the right side of the road, with traffic**, not against traffic like pedestrians must do when walking along the road. Riding with traffic makes a bicyclist more visible and their movements more predictable to motorists. Riding against traffic is one of the leading causes of crashes.

The law requires bicyclists to use hand signals for turns or lane changes. They must have a bell or horn audible for 100 feet. If they ride at night, they must have a white front headlight visible for at least 500 feet, and a red taillight visible for at least 300 feet.

LED technology is readily available for cyclists and is very important to their safety. I, as a bike rider often on rural roads and state highways, ride with a red rear LED light on "flashing" mode during the daytime, and if visibility is an issue, I also ride with my headlight on flash as well. These lights get the attention of motorists coming up behind me and certify my presence to oncoming drivers as well. Flashing lights on bicycles, as opposed to vehicles, are allowed because a bicycle is not a "motor vehicle".

The law also requires bicyclists less than 14 years old to wear a certified bike helmet. A parent who permits his or her child to violate this helmet law is subject to a fine of up to \$50. For safety reasons, **ALL** bicyclists should wear helmets. Adults should set the example because children learn from what they see.

Children 1 to 4 years old carried on a bicycle as a passenger must wear a certified bicycle helmet AND ride in a child safety seat. Children less than one are prohibited from being transported on a bicycle.

Now for motorists – there are some things you need to know about how to drive around bicycles. First, remember (I know I'm repeating this, but for a good reason) that bicycles have just as much right to use the street or road as you do. Respect them, and give them space. Any collision between a bicyclist and a motor vehicle will result in the motor vehicle winning. Whenever approaching a bicyclist, move over into the oncoming lane if no vehicles are approaching, and if there are approaching vehicles, move as far to the left of your lane as possible and **SLOW DOWN!** Section 1122-a of Vehicle and Traffic Law requires the driver of a vehicle overtaking, from behind, a bicycle proceeding on the same side of a roadway to pass to the left of such bicycle "**at a safe distance until safely clear thereof**". When I'm riding on a road with centerline rumble strips I love to hear the noise they make when a car drives over them, because I then know that car is moving over to pass me more safely.

Let's cover another issue where there may be some misunderstanding. I bicycle quite frequently, and I find that motorists on town roads, where there are no pavement markings, will drive way over to the left to give me plenty of space. But, on state roads, where the center line is painted, motorists will frequently not cross it, even when there are no approaching vehicles. Some drivers may think it is illegal for them to cross the centerline, but it isn't. It's permissible to cross even a double solid line, provided it is safe to do so, to put more space between a motor vehicle and pedestrians and bicyclists.

So let's be courteous and share the road, motorists AND bicyclists.