

Bicycling in Madison - Tips for a Safer Ride

Madison is the bicycling capital of the Midwest! With over 100 miles of bikeways, and more being planned and constructed each year, Madison recognizes the bicycle as a viable means of transportation as well as a popular life long recreational, health and fitness activity. Over 100,000 trips per day are made by bicycle, weather permitting, helping to keep our air clean and our streets less congested. Madison has received many accolades for our livability recently. Madison's bicycle friendliness is a factor in many of these ratings.

Madison has not, however, escaped the recent trend in "road anger". Understanding a few basic concepts can go a long way towards reducing the conflicts between motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians.

Accept the Responsibilities that Go Along With Your Rights. Madison and Wisconsin laws recognize bicycles as vehicles and give you, the bicycle driver, the right to use most roads. Along with this right comes the responsibility to obey the same laws as other drivers.

Be Predictable. Traffic laws prevent chaos on the streets. When anyone operates outside of these rules, it is unexpected and may lead to crashes.

Be Visible. Don't hide from traffic. Wear bright colors during the day. Use lights and reflectors at night. Make sure others can see you and that you can see the road. The words "I didn't see him" appear on crash reports too often.

Communicate With Other Drivers. Make eye contact and signal you turns and lane changes.

Be Aware of Hazards. Know what to look for and how to react to the roadway and traffic hazards bicyclists face. Watch the road ahead for surface hazards like broken glass, sand, potholes and railroad tracks. Watch for entering and turning traffic at intersections and driveways. Trees, shrubs and fences can create visual screens. Adapt your riding style to minimize these and other hazards.

Obey all traffic signs and signals. Obeying the law is your first defense against crashes, and is the best way to gain respect from other road users.

Always ride *with* traffic. Riding against traffic is unpredictable, especially to drivers at intersections, driveways or parking spaces. Bike lanes go one way only, in the same direction as adjacent traffic, unless otherwise signed.

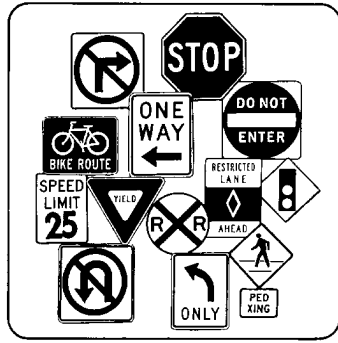
Ride at least 3 feet from parked cars to avoid being hit by a suddenly opened car door.

Always look behind you for traffic before changing your position on the road.

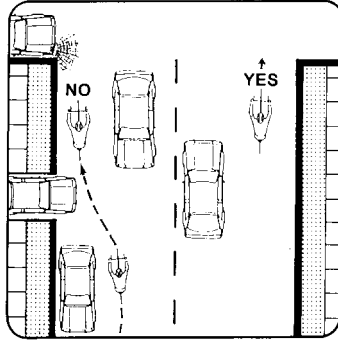
Cross railroad tracks at a right angle to avoid getting your front wheel caught and falling.

Ride defensively. Be aware of what is going on around you, and watch for others' mistakes. Some common situations to watch for include: a motorist coming towards you who turns left in front of you; a motorist passing you and then turning right in front of you; a motorist pulling out from a stop sign, driveway, or parking space without yielding to you.

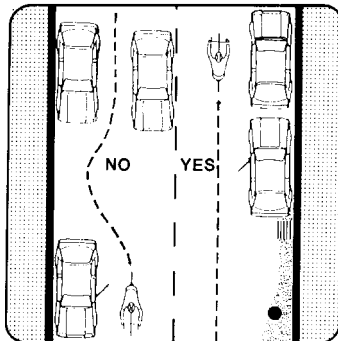
Respect the Rights of Others. If you, as a bicyclist, want to earn the respect of motorists and pedestrians, then you need to respect their rights as well. Never compromise someone else's safety for your own convenience.



Obey all traffic signs and signals. They apply to all vehicles, including bicycles. Obeying the law is the best way to gain respect from other road users. Bicyclists can be ticketed for traffic violations.

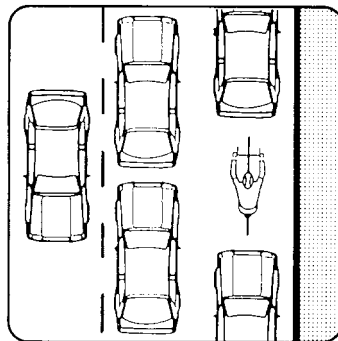


Always ride with traffic. Riding against traffic is unpredictable. Drivers turning at intersections, exiting driveways or leaving parking spaces are not expecting wrong way bicyclists. Wrong way riding is a contributing factor in many bicycle crashes.

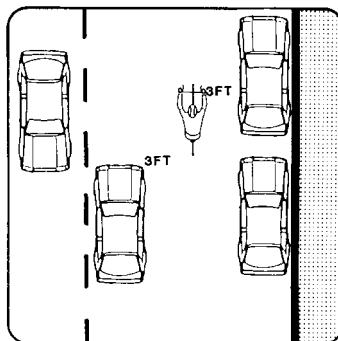


Ride as far to the right as practicable, but stay far enough away from the curb to avoid hazards.

Ride three feet from parked cars to avoid a suddenly opened car door, and ride in a straight line.

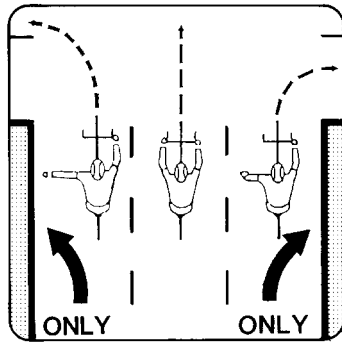


Ride further out in the lane when traveling at the same speed as other traffic, when the lane is too narrow to safely share with cars, and when approaching intersections to be more visible.



Three feet of clearance is required when passing moving or stopped cars or bicycles.

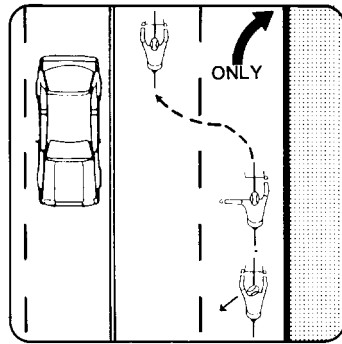
Motorists passing bicycles have to give three feet of clearance, too.



Follow lane markings. Go straight in a through lane, not a right turn only lane.

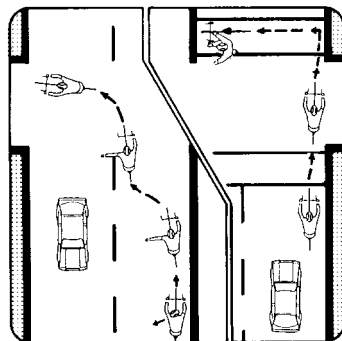
Make left turns from the left lane, if there is one, or the left side of the through lane.

Look behind you for traffic and give hand signals before turning.



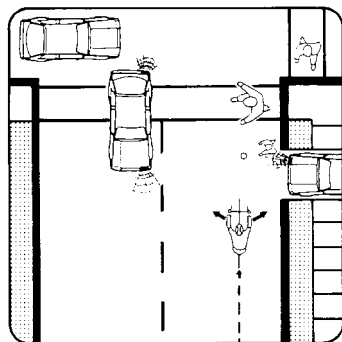
To change lanes, look behind you for traffic and signal first. Traffic in the lane you want to move into has the right of way.

Look back and wait for an opening in traffic before moving over.



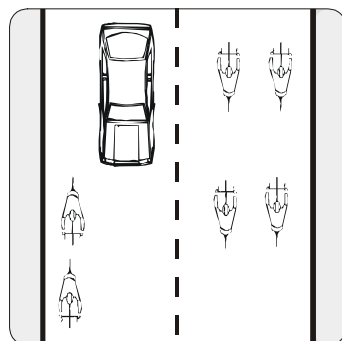
Two ways to make a left turn: (1) Look back for traffic, signal, and move to the left side of the lane when safe.

(2) Ride straight through the intersection, dismount at the opposite corner and walk your bike across the street.

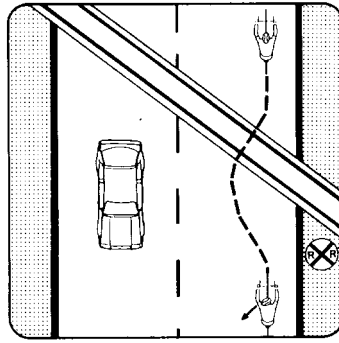


Scan the road ahead. At intersections, watch for turning cars and pedestrians. Mid-block, watch for cars pulling out of driveways, alleys and parking spaces.

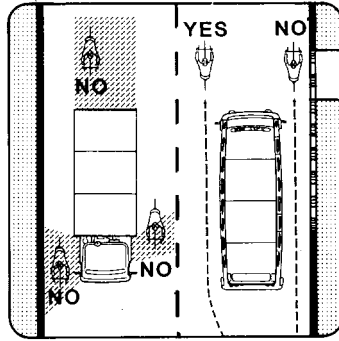
Make eye contact with other drivers. Yield the right of way to pedestrians in crosswalks.



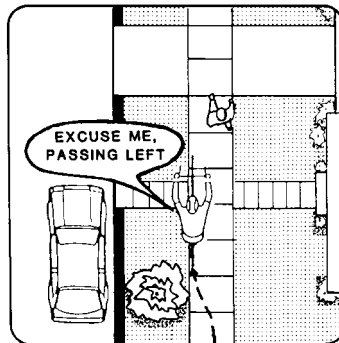
Ride single file when other traffic is present. Riding two-abreast is permitted as long as other traffic is not impeded.



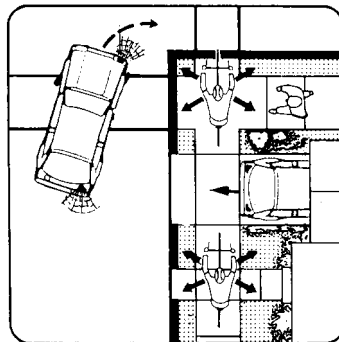
Cross railroad tracks at a right angle to avoid getting your front wheel caught. Slow down and look behind you for traffic. Change your lane position if necessary to line up to cross the tracks at a right angle. Return to your original lane position after crossing the tracks.



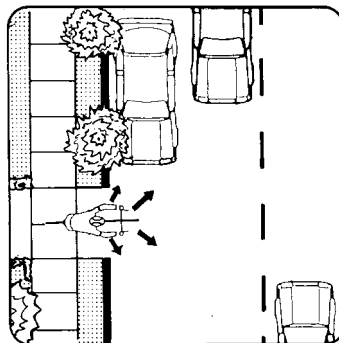
Pass buses on the left. Bus drivers have blind spots to their right and rear. Passing on the right could get you squeezed against the curb if the bus pulls over. Be prepared to stop for pedestrians who may cross the street in front of the bus.



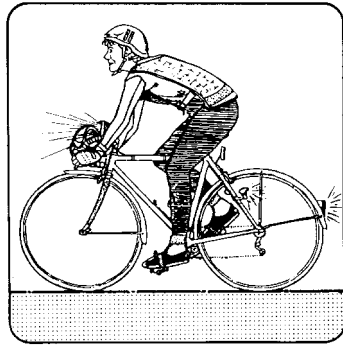
Bicycling on sidewalks is permitted, except where buildings about the sidewalk. Pedestrians always have the right of way on sidewalks and in crosswalks. Give an audible warning before passing pedestrians, and pass with care.



Watch for cars crossing the sidewalk at driveways, alleys and intersections. Buildings, fences, poles, trees, shrubs, and parked cars can hide you from traffic and make it difficult for you to see them, too. At intersections, you have the same responsibilities as pedestrians.



Stop and scan for traffic before entering the street from a driveway, alley or sidewalk. Look left, right, and left again, and wait for traffic to clear before entering the street.



Be visible. At night, a white light to the front and a red rear reflector are required. Additional lights and reflectors can, and should, be used. Bright colors help you to be seen during the day.

Don't Leave Home Without It!

What is the most important piece of equipment needed to ride a bicycle?

— A helmet!

If you wear a bicycle helmet, you are a well-dressed and well protected bicyclist. If you don't wear a helmet, consider this: three out of four bicycle related deaths and permanently disabling injuries are caused by brain damage.

Helmets prevent brain damage. Sure, we don't like to think about bike crashes, but they're a fact of life. They happen on both busy streets and back roads. They often don't involve a car. They can happen to anyone, and for different reasons.

For example, a youngster learning to ride falls over. A professional racer slips on a tight turn. A recreational rider's tire pops on a downhill run. A parent, with a child seat behind, hits a patch of gravel.

The best defense is safe and skilled handling of the bicycle, but you cannot control the actions of others and sometimes we miss the cues to hazardous situations. The smart and well-dressed cyclist wears a helmet on every ride. If you value your head, you will too.

In Case of A Crash

Stop Immediately. It's against the law to leave the scene of a crash without identifying yourself and giving assistance.

Help the Injured. Call 911 for a rescue squad if needed.

Call Police. All crashes involving a motor vehicle that result in injury, or property damage exceeding \$1,000 must be reported to the police. Other crashes or falls should be reported as well to protect the legal rights of victims and to aid public officials in identifying and correcting crash causes.

How and Where to Lock Your Bicycle

Lock your bicycle in a bike rack, when available. There are bike racks throughout the downtown and the UW campus, and in all City parking ramps.

Where there are no bike racks, lock your bicycle to something that cannot be easily broken. Bike thieves have been known to steal bicycles, lock and all, and break the lock later.

Remember, it is illegal to park your bicycle against a tree, or where it would block access for persons with disabilities.

Lock your bicycle in a well-lit, well traveled area. Dark alleys and other out of the way places give thieves time to work.

Buy the best lock you can afford. Keep the lock and/or cable off the ground so a thief cannot use the ground for leverage.

Think about others. Will your bicycle block a doorway, stairs, crosswalk, ramp or other access, or will it generally be in the way of pedestrians?

Keep your bicycle locked indoors overnight, if possible.

Share the Path

There are over 35 miles of bicycle paths in Madison. These paths are used by a variety of users, including bicycle commuters, recreational bicyclists, families, pedestrians and skaters. By following a few basic rules, these paths can be shared safely by all users.

- ◆ All users should keep to the right side of the path.
- ◆ When traveling side-by-side, stay on the right half of the path.
- ◆ Faster users should yield to slower users.
- ◆ Always travel at a safe speed, with due regard for others. Faster users may want to consider alternate routes to ensure the safety of all users.
- ◆ Pass others on the left. Slow down, give an audible warning such as ringing a bell or calling out “excuse me, passing left”, and wait for a reaction before passing.
- ◆ Move off the pathway when stopping.
- ◆ Be careful when crossing streets and driveways. Watch for traffic and make sure other drivers are aware of the path and your presence.