

## Dangerous Bicycle Laws

Actual laws from some communities in Ohio

- “Wherever a designated path for bicycles has been provided adjacent to a street, bicycle riders shall use such path and shall not use the street.”
- “Any person operating a bicycle shall ride upon the sidewalk rather than the roadway when sidewalks are available and not congested with pedestrian traffic.”
- “Every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to the right side of the roadway as practicable...”

The above are based on superstition. The rate of cycling accidents on sidewalks and sidepaths is double the rate on streets.

- “No person shall ride a bicycle across or through an intersection when crossing a through street. Such intersections are to be crossed by walking the bicycle across or through the intersection.”

Would they ask motorists to push their cars through intersections?

- “A person operating a bicycle shall yield the right of way to vehicular traffic on a roadway.”

Bicycle drivers should yield when the situation demands it, but NOT when it is the motorist's duty to yield. Bicycles are vehicles under Ohio law. Bicycle traffic is vehicular traffic.

These laws violate well-established principles of traffic operation including the uniformity of traffic laws. They require expert cyclists to imitate beginners. It is wiser for novices to learn from experts.

Imagine if the people who write motor vehicle laws were non-drivers. Now imagine that the police enforcing these laws also did not know how to drive. Finally, imagine that highway engineers were ignorant of how cars are operated. Does this sound insane and frightening? This is precisely the situation for those who drive bicycles!

Public officials will misinterpret even reasonable laws if they are ignorant of proper cycling methods and instead believe superstitions.

**Misinformed governments make bad laws.  
Cyclists have the duty to educate.**

## Seven Safe Cycling Rules

### 1. Follow the rules of the road

- \* Ride on the right side of the road
- \* Avoid sidewalks
- \* Don't be an “outlaw” at traffic lights & stop signs

### 2. Be visible

- \* Wear bright conspicuous clothes
- \* Use lights at night
- \* Ride where other drivers are looking for traffic

### 3. Be predictable

- \* Ride a “clean” (straight) line
- \* Signal lane changes and yield where required

### 4. Learn proper cycling methods

- \* Join a cycling club or get tips from a mentor
- \* Read *Effective Cycling* or *Street Smarts*
- \* Watch experienced cyclists

### 5. Keep your bike in safe condition (especially brakes, lights and reflectors)

### 6. Carry proper safety equipment (lights, helmet, cycling gloves, first aid kit)

### 7. Teach others once you learn proper technique

- \* Act as a mentor and set a good example
- \* Educate local public officials

### For More Information:

*Street Smarts* is available from *Bicycling Magazine* (610) 967-8722 or on the web at <http://www.dot.state.pa.us/pennidot/bicycle.nsf/biketoc?readform>. *Effective Cycling* is available from book retailers or see [www.chainguard.com](http://www.chainguard.com). The *Effective Cycling* video is available from the League of American Bicyclists, (202) 822-1333. Ask your library to get the video. Read about bicycle transportation engineering in *Bicycle Transportation* by John Forester

Direct any questions about this brochure to  
[Fred\\_Oswald@compuserve.com](mailto:Fred_Oswald@compuserve.com). Rev F, Mar 2000

## Guide for Bicycle Transportation

### For cyclists and public officials



Cycling to work, and for errands is enjoyable, practical, healthful and safe if you do it properly. This guide will help you avoid typical mistakes.

Cycling is community-friendly and good for the environment. Therefore, government has the duty to help cyclists. Unfortunately, through ignorance and superstition, many state and local governments pass laws that discriminate against cyclists and mandate dangerous practices. This guide points out some of these problems.

Cyclists must teach public officials about “Vehicular Cycling”. Vehicular Cycling means operating a bicycle according to the standard rules of the road for vehicles. This is the safest and most efficient way to operate a bicycle.

Traffic engineers and planners, as a matter of professional competence, must know Vehicular Cycling or employ qualified consultants whenever their work impacts cyclists. They should take an *Effective Cycling* course and read about cycling issues in “Dilemmas of Bicycle Planning”, <http://web.mit.edu/1.252j/www/dilemmas.htm>.

For more advocacy information and proposed Model Laws for Bicycles, see the web sites of the Ohio Bicycle Federation; [www.ohiobike.org](http://www.ohiobike.org) and [www.crankmail.com](http://www.crankmail.com).



Join the **Ohio Bicycle Federation** and help make cycling better. See [www.ohiobike.org](http://www.ohiobike.org) or write to: OBF, P.O. Box 752131, Dayton, OH 45475-2131.

# Ohio Traffic Laws for Bicycles

A bicycle is defined (section 4501.01) as a vehicle. This means that cyclists have "All of the rights and all the responsibilities." **Bicycles must be driven on the right side of the road.**

## 4511.40 Hand and arm signals

(B) ..., a person operating a bicycle may give a right turn signal by extending the right hand and arm horizontally to the right side of the bicycle.

**Note: The reform above passed in 1996 thanks to the efforts of the Ohio Bicycle Federation.**

## 4511.53 Rules for bicycles, ...

A person operating a bicycle or motorcycle shall not ride other than upon the permanent and regular seat attached thereto, nor carry any other person upon such bicycle...

No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle or article that prevents the driver from keeping at least one hand on the handle bars.

No bicycle or motorcycle shall be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it was designed and equipped...

## 4511.54 Prohibition against attaching bicycles and sleds to vehicles

No person riding upon any bicycle, ... shall attach the same or himself to any ... vehicle upon a roadway.

## 4511.55 Place and manner of operating bicycles; riding bicycles...

(A) Every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to right side of the roadway as practicable obeying all traffic rules applicable to vehicles and exercise due care when passing a standing vehicle or one proceeding in the same direction.

(B) Persons riding bicycles or motorcycles upon a roadway shall ride not more than two abreast in a single lane....

**Problem:** Section (A) above encourages the dangerous practice of riding *too close* to the edge of the road. The purpose is to prevent slow traffic from blocking faster traffic. Experienced riders will let cars pass when they can but will "take the lane" when they must, especially in 'substandard width lanes' and at intersections.

## 4511.56 Equipment of bicycles

(A) Every bicycle when in use at the times specified in section

4513.03 of the Revised Code shall be equipped with the following:

(1) A lamp on the front that shall emit a white light visible from a distance of at least five hundred feet to the front;

(2) A red reflector on the rear of a type approved by the director of public safety that shall be visible from all distances from one hundred feet to six hundred feet when directly in front of lawful lower beams of head lamps on a motor vehicle.

(3) A lamp emitting red light visible from a distance of five hundred feet to the rear shall be used in addition to the red reflector;

(B) ... equipped with a bell or other device giving a signal audible... 100 feet...

(C) Every bicycle shall be equipped with an adequate brake when used on a street or a highway.

# Vehicular Cycling

There is a lot more to riding a bicycle than steering and balance. Much of what we were taught as kids is wrong and some is dangerous. The best and safest method for cycling in traffic is *Vehicular Cycling* -- following the rules of the road for drivers of vehicles

Vehicular Cycling is taught in the **Effective Cycling** program. There is a book, a video and a course all with the name *Effective Cycling*. You may find the video or the book at your library (ask) or buy your own copy. The League of American Bicyclists sponsors *Effective Cycling* courses.

*Vehicular Cycling* involves "**Five Rules for Traffic Cycling**". These are excerpted from the book *Effective Cycling* by John Forester, published by the M.I.T. Press. Copyright John Forester.

1. **Drive on the right side of the road, never on the left and never on the sidewalk.**
2. **When you reach a more important or larger road than the one you are on, yield to crossing traffic. Here, yielding means looking to each side and waiting until no traffic is coming.**
3. **When you intend to change lanes or to move laterally on the roadway, yield to traffic in the new lane or line of travel. Here, yielding means looking forward and backward until you see that no traffic is coming.**
4. **When approaching an intersection, position yourself with respect to your destination direction -- on the right near the curb if you want to turn right, on the left near the centerline if you want to turn left, and between those positions if you want to go straight.**
5. **Between intersections position yourself according to your speed relative to other traffic; slower traffic is nearer the curb and faster traffic is near the centerline.**

**Effective Cycling teaches --**

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

# Bike Safety Superstition

Most non-cyclists and beginners believe that the greatest danger of riding on the road is being struck down from behind by cars. However, accident studies show that the biggest hazard is actually from turning and crossing traffic at intersections. Being run down from the rear is mostly a superstition. The superstition leads to dangerous practices.

Imagine driving a car on a 2-lane country road. If the weather is fair and the road good, you may drive 55, 60, maybe 70 mph. Cars passing from the other direction will be going similar speeds. This means you have a speed difference of over 100 mph relative to vehicles passing only an arm's length away.

Who is driving that approaching car? Is the driver drunk or on drugs, perhaps sleepy or reaching for a dropped French-fry? If that driver does something foolish, it can cause a disastrous head-on collision.

You probably do not even blink when you pass. Why are you not terrified of a mistake by the "other driver"?

We suggest two reasons. (1) You know such collisions are very rare. (2) You are used to the hazard. More important than what the other driver **might do** is **what you do**. Another driver's mistake may miss you but your mistake will not. Wake up! Watch the road! Leave the French fry on the floor!

The situation is the same for a cyclist. There is always the possibility of being hit from behind. It is natural to think about that risk. But experienced cyclists know the risk is extremely small and they are used to it.

In contrast, novices make dangerous mistakes due to fear and superstition. They prefer to ride on separate bikepaths or sidewalks despite accident statistics that show these increase the crash rate by 2½ times. Some ride on the wrong side of the road (3.6 times the risk). If they do ride on the correct side of the road, they ride too close to the edge, which can lead to collisions with turning cars and this also encourages motorists to pass where there is insufficient room.