



Bicycle Access Council News & Digest

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Hello Members and Supporters of the Bicycle Access Council.

It's a beautiful day in Pennsylvania!

This month's News & Digest includes a reprint of a guest editorial submitted by BAC to a local Sunday edition newspaper and a follow-up editorial from the same local daily newspaper — Comments?

YORK DAILY RECORD / SUNDAY NEWS

VIEWPOINTS

Community Columnist

May 10, 2009

Sharing the Road with Bikes—

by Joe Stafford

May is Bike Month and this week, May 11-15, is Bike-to-Work Week — not the motorcycle kind of bike — I mean bicycles.

It began in the 1950's and 60's as a bicycle industry promotion for children's bicycles. Most kids had bikes. I certainly did, and ran a pretty successful paper route with one. Then in the 1970's, the national League of American Bicyclists took over the role to promote Bike Month to increase awareness of bicycles as an alternate means of transportation. For those of us who experienced the oil embargo aftermath of 1973, lots of adults renewed their interest in "driving a bicycle" in reaction to low gasoline supply. Many of the bicycle clubs still in existence today can trace their origins back to the 1970's too. Last summer's \$4 per gallon gasoline had drivers dusting off their old bikes once again for short commutes and errands.

However, bicycling on roadways is more than balancing on two wheels. There are rules of the road to follow as well as skills that may not be intuitively obvious to the casual rider. Unsafe practices arise when bicyclists are "self-taught" or rely on what they think they were taught years ago. Parents are often the biggest source of misinformation if they are not competent bicyclists themselves and unthinkingly advise their children on how and where to ride. There are even some misconceptions to dispel in an attempt to raise awareness about "vehicular cycling" in today's traffic environment and what Share the Road means.

An important part of raising awareness about bicycling is to remind the public that Pennsylvania, as well as all other states, regard bicycles as vehicles, which are permitted to use most roadways with all the same rights and responsibilities as any motor vehicle. The few exceptions are toll roads and selected controlled-access highways. After all, bicycles were in wide

use before automobiles and it was the League of American Bicyclists (then called the League of American Wheelmen) that lobbied Congress in the 1890's for better roads to overcome ruts and potholes made by horses and wagon wheels.

So what are the responsibilities of bicyclists on the roadway today? Bicyclists and motorists are subject to the same rules-of-the-road. That means driving a bicycle in the direction of traffic, obeying traffic controls (traffic signals, stop and yield signs), using lights at night, signaling intended turns, etc. Let's spell that out.

A bicycle must be operated in the direction of traffic—not facing traffic. This is often confused with rules for pedestrians who must face traffic if walking on a roadway. There are many reasons why this is the better practice, but it's also the law according to the Pennsylvania Vehicle Code. Wrong-way riding accounts for a high percentage of annual bicycling crashes resulting in death and injury.

The Vehicle Code also covers the requirements for lights at night and mandatory bicycle helmet use for bicyclists under the age of 12. A front white light is mandatory at night, not only to see but, to be seen. Although only a red reflector is required facing rearward, highly visible battery powered LED lights are recommended and readily affordable.

How about the rights of bicyclists? It's pretty much the same for everyone too. All vehicle rules-of-the-road are based on the first come-first serve principle. That means the bicycle traveling in front of you is not taking up your space and has no duty to yield, or get out of your way. In fact, it's recommended by all bicycling guides, including those published by PennDOT, that bicyclists maintain a straight and predictable course on the roadway. According to the Vehicle Code, a bicyclist may use a roadway shoulder, if there is one, but is not required to, especially if it has debris or is otherwise unsafe. That may frustrate a motor vehicle driver who can't understand why a bicyclist won't move over, but the position in a lane chosen by a skilled bicyclist is for the safety of all. And, that lane position is the key to how bicyclists and motor vehicles interact safely to share the road.

Where a bicyclist positions himself within a lane is meant to maintain a margin of safety. A skilled bicyclist will stay well to the left of parked cars to avoid getting "doored" by someone exiting a vehicle who didn't see a bicycle approaching. Steering clear of vehicle side mirrors, tree branches and other hazards guide most bicyclists to ride in the right tire track of a single lane. Riding too close to a curb or ragged road edge has its own dangers for a crash. It also invites overtaking motor vehicles to pass too close within a lane too narrow to share. The "no harm, no foul" rule does not apply just because no contact is made. Passing a bicyclist within inches is careless driving, which is why bicyclists are permitted to "control the lane" for safety.

Currently the Pennsylvania General Assembly is considering updating the Vehicle Code and the Crimes Code to clarify the rules of the road for overtaking bicyclists and for improving safety for bicyclists on the roadway. Meanwhile, John Forester, the author of a classic book entitled *Effective Cycling* says it well: "Cyclists fare best when they act and in turn are treated as drivers of vehicles."

Joe Stafford is a resident of York Township and Executive Director, Bicycle Access Council

Ed note: The following editorial appeared just two days later in support of the pending bicycle safety legislation as created by BAC.

York [PA] Daily Record

05/12/2009

Share the road with bicyclists

Rep. Ron Miller proposes cracking down on drivers who endanger cyclists.

Bravo to state Rep. Ron Miller, R-Loganville, for introducing two bills that would improve safety for bicyclists.

At a rally last week in Harrisburg designed to promote May as "Bike Month" in Pennsylvania, Rep. Miller peddled out the two proposals:

- House Bill 1109 specifies that any driver who knowingly maneuvers his or her motor vehicle to intimidate or harass a cyclist or pedestrian, or any driver or passenger in a motor vehicle who directs threatening gestures or language at a cyclist or pedestrian, commits a second-degree misdemeanor.
- House Bill 1110 establishes a minimum four-foot safe passing distance, at a reduced speed when possible, for overtaking bicycles on the highway. It also prohibits drivers from making sudden right turns in front of a cyclist proceeding in the same direction.

Anyone who has ridden the (mostly shoulderless) roads of York County for fun, exercise or simply for emissions-free transportation knows that these are necessary measures to protect bikers from inconsiderate, unsafe and sometimes road-raging motorists.

The story about Rep. Miller's bills appeared on the inyork.com/ydr Web site last week, and readers promptly commented on the proposals.

Here's part of one comment by "Just Me" (emphasis added):

"I see bikes on some of my alternate routes to work. It's enough problem when a bicyclist simply swings right into *your* driving lane to avoid a storm drain and as the car driver, you're left to react. Most likely, your only reaction is to hug the left side of *your* lane or go slightly across the line. So, is "horn honking" when they cut into *your* lane like that a threatening gesture for bill 1109?

"Four feet passing distance does not work well on a road, especially after a sudden move of a bicyclist into *your* lane. You WILL have your car in the opposing travel lane to pass them under the letter of the law. The bicyclists should be fined for impeding the normal flow of traffic if they're in the travel lane for any extended period of time and not off to the side."

The choice of language in this comment perfectly illustrates the problem.

It's not *your* lane.

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The bicyclist has as much legal right to that lane as you do.

Cyclists are not required to ride on the (usually nonexistent) shoulder. And there is actually a danger for them in staying far to the right of the travel lane. It gives drivers the mistaken impression that they have room to pass at regular speed and remain wholly in the lane.

That makes for many unnerving close calls for cyclists.

And that's why many cyclists choose instead to control the lane by riding generally in the right tire track of the lane. That forces motorists to slow down and pass with care -- and only when it is safe to do so.

Of course, in our fast-paced, self-centered world, this angers some obnoxious drivers who intentionally drive too close and too fast past bicyclists. Heaven forbid their gas-guzzling SUVs should be slowed down for five seconds to pass safely en route to buy beer, cigarettes or artery-clogging fast food.

That said, there are bad bicyclists on the road, too, who fail to heed traffic laws, stop signs, drive the wrong direction and generally make hazards of themselves.

If police are going to go after intimidating drivers, as Rep. Miller's bills would require, they should also cite bad bicyclists.

Meanwhile, let's all just be considerate and safe out on the road. Passing a cyclist safely won't cost you any more time than "Just Me" wasted typing his misguided comment. In fact, a lot less.

— *Editorial Board*

MISSION STATEMENT...

The Bicycle Access Council is a non-profit advocacy organization that serves as a forum for Pennsylvania bicyclists and as an ombudsman for bicycling issues.

It is the objective of the Bicycle Access Council to make bicycling on roads throughout the Commonwealth safe, respectable and a transportation choice by educating its members and the motoring public.

All funding for the Bicycle Access Council comes from memberships and donations. Annual membership is \$20 per year. BAC does not share membership information.



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