

RULES OF THE ROAD

A MANIFESTO FOR SAFE GROUP BICYCLING ©

Pete Kieffer – Sacramento CA

Information contained herein is intended to provide a general guide to safe group bicycling on bike trails as well as on city streets. Be aware that you share the highways and byways with other bicyclists, pedestrians, dogs, squirrels, turkeys, and automobiles; and, that they also have rights. When in doubt, always think of yourself as being a car, with rights and responsibilities pertaining thereto. The Motor Vehicle Code applies to bicycles as well as to cars. Thinking like a pedestrian or just plain not thinking can hurt you, or others, very badly. Remember, you are ultimately responsible for your own safety, and for that of others who depend on you to be predictably safe.

BE PREDICTABLY SAFE!

OBEY THE LAWS!

USE COMMON SENSE!

SIGNALS:

Give clear arm/hand signals and/or voice signals. It's the responsibility of each and every person regardless of the number of riders, whether it is two or fifty. It's a proactive group thing. A rider behind you depends on you for clear information and signals! You depend on each other! Do not leave safety to chance!

- Signaling is not for the meek. **Everyone** signals! **Everyone** shouts it out! **Everyone** sees or hears it! Do not leave the person behind you or the car approaching you guessing at what you are going to do.
- Signal changes in your speed or direction, whether you *think* anyone is behind you or not; especially when your changes are abrupt or unexpected.
- Use your mirror. It minimizes head turning; and, it gives you of a much wider and deeper field of view of cars and bicycles which may be to your rear. If you see a car or bicycle approaching from behind, delay passing or changing lanes until your way is clear. But don't rely solely on your mirror. Always do "shoulder checks" to make certain another rider or car is not in one of your blind spots.
- Most group bicycling accidents are "wheel-on-wheel"; or, the front wheel of a trailing bike collides with the rear wheel of a leading bike when the leading bike does not signal. The trailing bike always loses in such a collision. Do not put the person behind you at risk by not signaling and shouting out "**SLOWING!**" or "**STOPPING!**".
- Hand/arm turn signals are the same for bicycles and cars. Right turns may be signaled by extending the right arm straight out to the right. When turning, shout it out: "**LEFT TURN!**" or "**RIGHT TURN!**"
- A merging signal is given by pointing a finger at the lane or line into which you are merging. It even helps to waggle your hand a little. You know, any little thing to attract attention.
- Signal obstacles or hazards following the same protocol: a finger point and a hand waggle, while announcing the hazard, e.g. "**BRANCH**", "**ROCK**", "**GLASS**", "**POST**", "**TRACK**", "**GRAVEL**", "**TURTLE**", "**BUMP**", etc. Shout it out! Don't put the person behind you at risk by not clearly signaling.
- Should you spy a car or another bicycle coming up behind you or approaching you from the opposite direction, shout out "**CAR BACK!**", "**BIKE BACK!**", or "**BIKE UP!**", etc, as appropriate, to ensure that all riders are alerted to the approaching hazard.
- When you are passing slower moving obstacles on the trail, give them a sharp ring on your bell, **DING!** Or simply say "**GOOD MORNING**" or "**PASSING**" in a voice loud enough to let them know you are there. Saying "right" or "left" confuses many people so don't bother to differentiate.

INTERSECTIONS: Remember, first and foremost, you are not a pedestrian. You are on a bicycle which, by law, must be operated in the same manner as a motor vehicle. Think like a car!

- **Obey all traffic control signals, including "Stop" signs.** There are no exceptions. Bicycles do not get a pass. Should you choose to make a "rolling stop" through an intersection, everybody, individually, makes certain the cross street is clear; and, shouts out "**CLEAR for me**" for the benefit of the person immediately behind them. Never roll through a stop sign when there is traffic present. Watch for policemen! They can cite each you for not coming to a full stop at a stop sign, just as they might do with a car. Whether you are at the front or rear of the pack makes no nevermind. **Each rider is individually responsible for obeying the law.**

- Obey all traffic signal lights; and all stop signs when traffic is present. Use extreme caution should you choose to roll through a stop sign on the bike trail or when there is no traffic present.
- Assure yourself that you have the right of way and your way is clear before making lane changes or riding into an intersection. Never blindly follow another rider into an intersection or a lane change. Stop, yield, or delay your maneuver when your way is not clear. Stop if the rider or car in front of you stops. Don't be in a hurry to injure yourselves or others by blindly charging into an intersection for fear of being separated from your group!
- Do not take the right of way which belongs to an automobile, even if the driver of that automobile gives you a wave. Stop, and politely decline. That driver may not realize s/he is putting you at risk; and, you might just be compounding the risk by taking them up on their offer. A bicycle does not enjoy unrestricted right-of-way. Yield when you do not have the right-of-way, and sometimes even when you do. When in doubt, yield.
- **You can get a \$154+ fine for riding your bicycle in a pedestrian crosswalk.** Most crosswalks are for pedestrians. If you do use a pedestrian crosswalk, please walk. There are exceptions such as when a bike trail channels you into a crossing; when the crossing is a designated as a bike trail crossing; or, when you have no other option for crossing safely. Use your best judgment.
- Most traffic light controls are sensitive to the presence of bicycles. Be patient when waiting for your "GO" light. Think and behave like a car. Push a pedestrian crosswalk button only when you intend to walk across an intersection - rather than more safely ride with the flow of traffic. An exception might be made when a light is known to cycle too quickly, allowing only a couple members of a group to get through an intersection. Use your best judgment. Do not, under any circumstances, run a red light.
- When crossing an intersection, stay with the normal traffic flow, keeping to the rightmost part of the rightmost lane servicing your direction of travel.

Examples:

- You are going straight through an intersection and there is a right turn only lane. Position yourself on the right side of the straight ahead lane (or on the line between the straight ahead and right turn lanes), taking care not to block either the straight ahead or right turn lanes. Proceed straight through the intersection on a green light.
- You are turning left at a major intersection with two left turn only lanes, two straight ahead lanes and two right turn only lanes. Anticipating your maneuver as far ahead as practical, merge left across the right turn and straight ahead lanes, one lane at a time. Do your shoulder checks and point at the lanes into which you are moving. Cars will let you move if they know what you are doing. **Signaling is of utmost importance!** Position yourself on the right side of the rightmost left turn lane (or on the line between the rightmost left turn lane and leftmost straight ahead lane). Execute your left turn by swinging wide, taking care not to block cars in the turning lane.
- An exception might be when you have a group which could be strung back a ways and not be able to make it through the intersection on a single light change. In this event, proceed as described above, except the group, en masse, takes the entire rightmost lane servicing your direction of travel. It's called "Taking the Lane". Proceed through the intersection in a tight peleton and immediately unfold back into single file as the intersection is cleared. If the light changes and any riders do not make it through the intersection, they must stop and wait for the next light! **Note: Running a red light in California is a \$426 fine for bicycles as well as for cars.**
- If you wish to wait for part of the group which is held up by a traffic light or sign, proceed to a point on the opposite side which is well clear of the intersection, a point which allows plenty of space for all riders to reassemble without obstructing traffic. Under no circumstances stop to wait on a corner. There may be standing space for the initial set of riders; but, there may not be sufficient space for the remaining riders once they cross the intersection. Don't be an obstacle. Keep intersections clear.

OBSTACLES and OTHER HAZARDS: Obstacles fall into classes which may include static objects such as posts, ruts, railroad tracks, rocks, ruts, etc; objects in motion such as dogs, turkeys, squirrels, children, and other bicyclists; and, circumstantial obstacles which are largely of our own creation. Whatever the class of obstacle, any can inflict grievous bodily harm upon any of us – at any time.

- There is nothing more predictable than an inanimate obstacle. They are easy to recognize and easy to avoid If they are seen. We all know what a post or a root rut in the middle of the trail can do As long as we know it is there, we can respond to its presence in an appropriate manner. Don't let it surprise the

person behind you who may not be able to see it when you do. Send back the signal: **“ROCK!”** and point at it as you pass. You might occasionally have to precede that with a **“SLOWING!”**.

- Most moving obstacles require a special vigilance to predict what, say, a person aimlessly strolling in the middle of the bike trail with a cell phone stuck in their ear might do. It could as well be a fat lady on a cruiser dragging a dog behind her on a 20 ft leash, or a double wide stroller accompanied by a child riding a wobbly kiddie bike. It is important to quickly get the attention of these obstacles. A bell with a good, sharp **“DING”** is quite useful in this regard. If all else fails, rudely bellow something akin to **“LOOK OUT!”** Slow with caution until you know you have the attention of the obstacle, then kick your speed up into overdrive and get past it as quickly as you can. It’s better to be rude than lying in the middle of the trail with a broken head.
- Do not linger on top of an obstacle or jam up against it lest you become part of it. Don’t be bashful! It is *your* well-being that is at risk!
- Animals are tricky. If you think you might run into one, respond in much the same manner as you might if you were driving a car. Don’t worry about hurting the cute little squirrel; be more concerned about its hurting you. Never swerve or try to miss it. Grip your handlebars firmly while keeping your arms and body flexed and loose. Stay focused on a point well ahead in your direction of travel and ride through the impact. When looking down at the critter with which you are about to collide; your eyes will take you to the ground on impact. It’s guaranteed! If you happen to have collided with a bear, then maybe you should have swerved. It’s really a matter of judgment based on your individual circumstances.
- Watch for bicyclists coming from the opposite direction who are riding double or even triple. They may “technically” be riding on their side of the centerline; however, their handlebars, arms, and shoulders may be extending a foot and a half or so into your lane. Move as far to the right as possible and give them a wide berth. Who is riding on what side of the centerline is not a point to be debated. This is not Texas. We do not like to play “Hook ‘em Horns”.
- Riding single file is the law on city streets. It’s common sense on bike trails. Unless you have a truly compelling reason for doing otherwise, ride single file. Having a social visit with your neighbor is not one of them. If you are distracted, you may inadvertently become a hazard to others. Riding double creates a hazard to those approaching you from the front as well as to those attempting to pass you from the rear. In any case, do keep your handlebars, arms, and shoulders on your side of the centerline, not just your wheel.
- You become an obstacle when you stop on the trail. When stopping, shout out **“STOPPING!”** and give the appropriate hand signal. After coming to a stop, quickly move both your bike and body off the paved surface. Check for bicycles and cars coming up behind you before you get back on the paved surface. If clear, shout **“CLEAR BACK!”** to those around you. Everybody checks! Everybody shouts! It should sound like an orchestral cacophony when the group gets moving.
- Bicycles in front of you may become an obstacle. If riders in front of you are putting you at risk by failing to signal, or their movements are erratic or otherwise unpredictable, stay clear! Either back off to give them plenty of space or pass them quickly while signaling your move, **“PASSING!”** Expect them to push you to the left into the oncoming lane rather than making space for you to safely pass.
- Unless you are “Taking the Lane” at an intersection or on a narrow roadway without a shoulder or bike lane, ride as far to the right side of your lane as is possible, except when passing hazards or cars which are parallel parked. Allow three feet for the unexpected opening of parked car doors. On bike trails, keep to the right, allowing others to safely pass from either direction.
- When regrouping at the top of a hill, proceed well beyond the crest of the hill to allow plenty of space for all riders to make it to the top. Don’t be an obstacle to those who may be struggling to finish the climb.
- Expect all animate obstacles, circumstantial or otherwise, to do the exact opposite of what you expect. You can only trust an inanimate object. Don’t become one.

PLEASE PROCEED WITH A MEASURED CAUTION. STAY ALERT!