

What is the Safest Lane Position?

Wouldn't life on the bike be simple if there were one answer for all situations? Frankly, life is not that simple, but there are some guidelines that will make riding in traffic much more enjoyable and safe. As I hope you are aware, I do a Facebook Live program each Thursday at 10 A.M. My guest on February 21st was Keri Caffrey, with the American Bicycle Education Association. You may have heard of Keri through the former name of her organization which was CyclingSavvy. Keri was instrumental in forming CyclingSavvy back in 2009 and has developed a state and national reputation for cycling safety instruction. Her organization provides cycling safety instruction in more than a dozen states. Although the name of the organization has changed, their course is still known as CyclingSavvy.

During our program Keri addressed the issue of lane position. Since she is based in Florida, she is well aware of the issues caused by the wording of our statute which contains some unfortunate and confusing terms. We are all familiar with the requirement that we are to ride as far to the right as is "practicable." But what does that look like in real life? Keri takes the position that practicable is determined by the cyclist in the situation they face.

The other confusing term in the statute is one of the exceptions to the requirement of riding as far to the right is practicable. That involves riding within a "substandard lane," which is any lane less than 14 feet wide (the minimum width needed for a 7 foot vehicle to pass a bicyclist within the same lane allowing for a minimum 3 foot passing distance). Since most roads in Florida are 10 or 12 feet wide, we are generally riding within a substandard lane in which it is not possible for a vehicle to safely pass us within the same lane. Thus we can take lane.

Keri made the point there is no one size fits all standard for taking the lane. The main point of her conversation was that being closer to the right side of the road does not communicate your lane position early enough for the driver to recognize they cannot pass you within the lane. She encourages cyclists to move further left of the right wheel line. When we do so, as Keri pointed out, even the most width estimating challenged motorists can easily determine they cannot pass you within

the lane. This allows them to recognize much more quickly that they must slow down or change into the adjacent lane before reaching you. This prevents the motorist from having to make a quick decision at the last moment when they are close enough to you to suddenly realize they can't safely squeeze past.

Keri provided numerous illustrations during our Facebook Live presentation about how moving further to the left increases rider visibility in order to minimize being hit by a right turning, left turning or parking lot exiting vehicle. She also provided a dramatic illustration of the cone of surveillance, where the driver's eyes will be focused at various speeds and locations on the road. She discussed how to avoid the door zone and gave some terrific suggestions on how to effectively communicate with drivers. I highly recommend that you check out our program: <https://www.facebook.com/jimdodsonlaw/videos/474601769740688/> . I also encourage you to check out their educational programs offered online and in the classroom at Cycling Savvy.org. Their cycling essentials course is free.

Jim Dodson is a cyclist and an experienced injury & bicycle accident lawyer. Although his primary office is in Clearwater, he represents injury victims throughout Florida. He is a bicycle safety advocate and serves on the Board of the Florida Bicycle Association. He is also the author of the Florida Bicycle Accident Handbook. For answers to you cycling questions, please visit www.floridacyclinglawyer.com.

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