Cycling is Fun and Functional

Bicycling is a great way to get around town for short trips and daily errands. Learn to share the road confidently and safely with vehicles, pedestrians and other cyclists by reviewing the information in this brochure. For maps and other helpful information, contact Whatcom Smart Trips at 360-756-TRIP (8747), or info@WhatcomSmartTrips.org.

Bike According to Traffic Laws

Bicycles are legally defined as vehicles. By obeying traffic laws, cyclists can avoid the most serious bicycle/car crashes. Just like motorists, cyclists who disobey traffic laws are subject to penalty fines. Be sure to observe these key traffic laws for road cycling:

- Ride in the same direction as motor traffic
- Stop at stop signs and traffic signals
- Stop for pedestrians in crosswalks and yield to people walking on trails
- Do not ride on sidewalks in Bellingham and Fairhaven business districts
- Do not use headphones or other electronic devices while cycling on roads or trails
- Use a bike bell, or a friendly voice, to warn other trail users when approaching

Bellingham Bike Markings

Bellingham is creating a safe, well-connected network to encourage bicycling by all members of our community. Look for these graphics painted on Bellingham streets to help you use that network.
Share the road safely and confidently
Five Principles of Confident City Cycling

1. Ride Visibly

Ride on the Right, with Traffic
Be visible to motorists by positioning your bike in the right third of the lane, not hugging the curb. Do not pass cars on the right.

Ride in the Middle of the Lane When Necessary
When lanes are too narrow to share, ride in the middle of the lane as a signal that motorists should cross into the other lane to pass you (as they would do for another vehicle). When riding along a row of parked cars, ride in the middle of the lane to avoid hitting suddenly opened car doors.

Use Lights and Reflectors at Night
Use a bright white headlight and red taillight at night to see and be seen. Cyclists without lights are invisible to motorists. Bright clothing and reflective bands increase visibility of cyclists during the day.

Avoid Riding on Sidewalks
Cyclists’ higher speed endangers people walking on sidewalks and puts cyclists on a collision course with turning motorists. Sidewalk riding is prohibited in the downtown areas of Bellingham and Fairhaven.

2. Communicate Your Intent

Choose the Appropriate Lane Position
Use your position in the lane as a signal of your intended direction. Position yourself in the left part of the lane when preparing to turn left, or the center when going straight.

Signal before Turning
Look back over your shoulder to check traffic and yield before signaling a turn. Use hand signals to indicate turns as shown in the diagram.

Make eye-contact
A rider’s view may be obstructed by other vehicles, signs, mirrors, or roof supports. Beware of blind spots and make eye-contact before entering an intersection.

3. Handle Intersections

Defensively
Most bicycle/car crashes happen at intersections. Cyclists can prevent most of these by obeying traffic laws and riding defensively. Move into the correct lane before coming to the intersection. Look back and yield to traffic before signaling and merging across lanes.

Turn Right
Approach the intersection in the middle of the right lane.

Turn Left
Approach the intersection in the lane that cars use to make left turns. Cyclists may also turn left by walking the bike as a pedestrian in the crosswalk.

Go Straight
Avoid colliding with right turning cars by riding in the center of the right lane or in the center lane if the intersection has a Right-Turn-Only lane. Avoid colliding with on-coming cars that are turning left by making eye contact with the on-coming driver and being prepared to slow or stop.

4. Beware of Roadway Hazards

Avoid Car Doors
Ride at least three feet from parked cars to avoid suddenly opened doors.

Avoid Slippery Surfaces
Wet leaves, steel plates, sand, and roadway markings can cause wheels to slip sideways, resulting in a crash. If you can’t avoid the slippery area, ride in a straight line without braking or turning.

Give Clearance to Angle Parked Cars
Drivers backing up have limited visibility. Allow five or six feet clearance behind parked cars on angle-parking streets.

Anticipate Driver Vision Problems
Morning and evening sun can blind drivers, especially if car windows are dusty. Ride defensively and make eye contact before proceeding through intersections.

Avoid Potholes, Debris and Broken Glass
Riding over debris or pot-holes can damage tires and cause you to lose control of your bike. Report roadway maintenance needs to the Public Works Department.

Cross Railroad Tracks Perpendicularly
Wheels can become stuck in the tracks, causing a fall. When approaching railroad tracks, move into a position to cross with your wheels at right angles to the tracks.

5. Prepare for Bicycling

Look for Bike Friendly Routes
The route you drive in a car isn’t necessarily the fastest or most appealing for bicycling. Use a Smart Trips bike map to plan routes with lower traffic, wider shoulders, or trails.

Check the ABCs
Each time before riding, check the Air, Brakes, Chain, and Quick release levers to make sure your bike is safe to ride.

Prepare for wet weather
Allow longer stopping distances and use bright-colored rain gear to increase your visibility during rainy weather.

Lock Securely
Lock your bicycle frame and wheels to a rack or permanent post using a U-shaped lock and a strong cable. Always lock your bike even for short stops. Register your bike at Project529.com. It may help you recover it if it’s stolen.

Wear Protective Gear
Following traffic rules and riding defensively prevent most crashes, but wearing a properly fitted helmet, gloves, and eye protection will reduce injuries if you’re in a crash.

Use bike accessories
Carry your belongings in a front basket or side bags suspended from a rear rack. Stay clean and dry with fenders.