

Bicyclist “Stop-As-Yield” Laws and Safety Fact Sheet

Background

Fatalities in traffic crashes involving bicyclists and other cyclists continue to rise. From 2011 to 2020, bicyclist and other cyclist fatalities increased by 38% from 682 in 2011 to 938 in 2020 (Stewart, 2022). In 2020, 26% of bicyclist and other cyclist fatalities occurred at intersections, which are extremely hazardous for bicyclists and present a high risk for crashes where bicyclists cross paths with motorists (NHTSA, 2022).

Bicycling has increased in popularity across the United States and provides many environmental, economic, and health benefits. Further, people in low-income, marginalized communities and communities of color may rely on biking as their primary mode of transportation. A safe transportation system makes people the priority and is designed to accommodate the mistakes people make. This approach requires all road users to work together using all available tools to help achieve zero injuries and fatalities on our Nation’s roadways. The ultimate goal is a transportation system that allows all people to get to their destinations safely.

Communities across the United States have been exploring ways to increase bicyclist safety and reduce confusion in potentially hazardous and high-risk situations. Many States have enacted bicycle safety laws to enhance safety and protect all road users. For example, bicyclist stop-as-yield laws allow bicyclists to treat stop signs as yield signs and/or red-light signals as stop signs. These laws allow bicyclists to mitigate risk to their advantage. “Stopping discourages bicycling, substantially increasing time, energy expenditure, discomfort, risk of collisions, and risk for strain and overuse injuries” (Tekle, 2017).

In 1982, Idaho was the first State to pass such a law, commonly known as the “Idaho Stop Law.” The law allows bicyclists to yield at stop signs and proceed when safe, rather than come to a complete stop. After Idaho adopted the law, bicyclist injuries from traffic crashes declined by 14.5% the following year (Meggs, 2010). In 2017, Delaware adopted a similar, limited stop-as-yield law, known as the “Delaware Yield.” Traffic crashes involving bicyclists at stop sign intersections fell by 23% in the 30 months after the law’s passage, compared to the previous 30 months. Eight States (Arkansas, Delaware, Idaho, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Utah, and Washington) have similar laws. Colorado passed a law in 2018 that allowed local municipalities to adopt standard language on safe bicycle yielding at stops. Table 1 shows a summary of State law characteristics. These laws do not negate a bicyclist’s responsibility to yield to other traffic before crossing an intersection or to follow all work zone traffic rules. State laws vary, so bicyclists must be sure to know the laws in their State.

Benefits: Safety, Environmental, and Transportation Impact

The benefits of bicycling extend beyond personal and physical, to environmental benefits that can lead to healthier, quieter, cleaner, and safer streets. Fewer motor vehicles on the road equate to less congestion and lower emission outputs.

Bicyclist stop-as-yield laws allow cyclists to mitigate risk to their advantage, increase their visibility to drivers and reduce exposure. Bicyclists have greater incentive to yield, as they are at high risk for injury at intersections. One study cites research showing that pedestrians and bicyclists exert more care and attention before crossing red signals than green (Leth et al., 2014). A naturalistic study of bicyclists in Florida’s Tampa Bay area found that bicyclists highly complied with general traffic rules (88.1% in the daytime, 87.5% at night). In contrast, drivers were mostly noncompliant with the law on yielding to bicyclists’ right-of-way (Lin et al., 2017). Additionally, there is no evidence showing bicyclist stop-as-yield laws have increased bike conflicts with other bikes or pedestrians. Roadway collisions between bicyclists with other cyclists or pedestrians are uncommon, as found in an Australian study (O’Hern & Oxley, 2019). When bicyclists can maintain a safe but precautionary momentum through an intersection, it allows continuous traffic flow.

Finally, bicyclist stop-as-yield laws decriminalize a riding behavior, possibly encouraging more ridership. More bicyclists on the roadway traveling together increases their visibility and attention by motorists, a concept referred to as “Safety in Numbers” (SIN). Studies of SIN show motorists drive more cautiously, and bicyclists are safer on roads when traveling with a higher volume of bicyclists. Research by Meggs (2010) suggests that removing stops may reduce injury risk by half through SIN alone.

A safe transportation system makes people the priority. Working together to enhance bicycle safety by preventing and eliminating crashes that lead to serious injuries and fatalities is more important now than ever. Many States have enacted bicyclist stop-as-yield laws to enhance safety and protect cyclists. Based upon the current research and data available, these laws showed added safety benefits for bicyclists in States where they were evaluated, and may positively affect the environment, traffic, and transportation.

For more information, please visit www.nhtsa.gov/road-safety/bicycle-safety.

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