

All On Cycling Club Safety Brief: Part 3 – Ride Right

For the third installment of the Safety Brief we are going to start talking about riding right on public roads. In the last installment I said we would talk about group riding, but I realize that we need to cover some fundamentals. Riding on public roads is a huge topic and may take multiple installments, so let's begin. For this installment I referenced the New Jersey Bicycling Manual (NJBM). Cyclists in New Jersey are required to follow the same traffic laws as motorists (with some minor deviations). NJ Title 39 (motor vehicle and traffic statutes) states that "every person riding a bicycle on a roadway shall ride as near to the right roadside as practicable exercising due care when passing a standing vehicle or one proceeding in the same direction. A bicyclist may move left under any of the following conditions: 1) To make a left turn from a left turn lane or pocket; 2) To avoid debris, drains, or other hazardous conditions on the right; 3) To pass a slower moving vehicle; 4) To occupy any available lane when traveling at the same speed as other traffic; 6) To travel no more than two abreast when traffic is not impeded, but otherwise ride in single file. Every person riding a bicycle shall ride in the same direction as vehicular traffic. In New Jersey, the law states a bicyclist must obey all state and local automobile driving laws. A parent may be held responsible for the child's violation of any traffic law."

Let's consider some scenarios:

-Can you cross the double lines and ride in the oncoming traffic lane to catch up to your friend? Nope! Why would you want to risk a head-on collision with a car?

-Traffic is stopped at a light and there isn't enough room to pass the vehicle traffic on the right, can you pass those cars on the left or weave between traffic? No! Drivers are expecting bicycles to pass on the right and may not be looking to their left. Can you ride on the sidewalk to pass the vehicle traffic? While not illegal, this is ill advised. "Sidewalks are for pedestrians. Although riding a bicycle on a sidewalk is not prohibited by statute, some municipalities have passed ordinances prohibiting bicycle traffic on certain sidewalks. This prohibition is usually posted. Riding on sidewalks can cause conflicts with pedestrians and, because it places bicyclists in situations where motorists do not expect them, it can lead to crashes. Except for very young cyclists under parental supervision (and not crossing intersections) sidewalks are not for bicycling." NJBM Page 15

-You are riding and an obstruction blocks your lane of traffic, can you move to the left to clear the obstacle? Yes! Just be aware of oncoming traffic in both directions and proceed when it is safe.

-You are riding and a pedestrian is walking in your lane of traffic, can you move left to pass the pedestrian? Yes, call out to the pedestrian and those in your group (we will talk more about signals and communication in a later installment.)

-It's the Spring Social ride and you want to catch up with your friends you haven't seen in months, can you ride more than two side by side? No, sorry! "New Jersey Law allows bicyclists to travel up to two abreast (but not more than two) when traffic is not impeded. Given the relatively high average traffic volumes on New Jersey roadways, there is limited opportunity to ride side by side with another bicyclist. (An exception would be where there are wide shoulders.) **If you are riding two abreast, as soon as you begin to impede the flow of traffic, you must resume riding single file as described above.** As a general rule, it is best to ride single file." NJBM Page 15

Ride Right: "This means riding on the right side of the road or on the shoulder, with traffic, not against it. The law says you must ride as far to the right as practicable. **This does not mean as far to the right as possible. Don't "hug the curb" where you may not be visible to motorists.** You should ride far enough out from the edge of the pavement to avoid broken up pavement edges, debris, drainage grates and standing water. Travel in a straight line; not weaving in and out of parked cars. **Stay about four feet away from parked cars to avoid the possibility of having a door opened in your travel path (getting "doored").** Riding right also means obeying traffic signals and signs, taking and yielding right-of-way appropriately and riding in a straight line." NJBM Page 11