

MARBLEHEAD REPORTER**CYCLE SENSE: Follow the law****Thomas Regan**

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Can you recall your early memories of riding a bike? It was fun and exciting, you did it with friends, and it gave you a sense of freedom you may not have felt before. However, this freedom comes with responsibility. According to Massachusetts law, a bicycle is a vehicle and as a bicycle rider, you have the same rights and duties as drivers. That means all bike riders have an obligation to be familiar with and obey the law. With a few exceptions, regulations pertaining to cyclists are the same as those for motorists, so following automobile laws is a good place to start.

Here are some common situations that you may have experienced and wondered, “Who is in the right?” You are driving on Humphrey Street and notice two bicycle riders on the opposite side of the street riding in the “wrong direction” (against instead of with traffic). A car pulls out from a side street and brakes abruptly to avoid hitting them. The bicycle riders were incorrectly riding on the wrong side of the road, facing traffic. Others are not expecting riders coming in this direction and often do not look carefully. In this case the driver is also at fault for not looking completely in both directions before pulling out. The same principles apply to riding the “wrong way” on one-way streets.

You are stopped at a red-light traffic signal and are passed on the right by a bicyclist who cruises through the intersection with barely a hint of slowing or stopping. Clearly the cyclist is in the wrong; he must obey all traffic signals and signs just as the driver is doing.

Motorists are expected to signal their intentions to turn, either right or left. Most appear to comply. The same expectation for turning applies to bicyclists, and they are expected to signal their intentions to slow and stop. Fewer cyclists seem to signal routinely. Cyclists may signal with either their right or left arms but are not required to do so when removing their hands from the handlebars could compromise their ability to ride safely.

It’s a busy Saturday and you are driving on Atlantic Avenue through the retail district. Just up ahead of you is a cyclist riding in the middle of the lane, showing no intention to turn or

move to the side to allow you to pass. What's going on? According to the law, a cyclist is allowed a safe and reasonable amount of space (about three feet) on either side, between parked cars and passing traffic. If there is not enough room to do this, the cyclist should ride in the middle of the traffic lane where other vehicles will have to wait until it's safe to pass rather than share the lane. This is called 'taking the lane'.

Similar to the last scenario, this time the cyclist on Atlantic Ave. is riding more than three feet away from the row of cars parked along the curb. Suddenly a car door opens into the path of the oncoming rider. The cyclist is alert and makes a quick evasive maneuver to avoid a crash and return to his straight line of travel. This is referred to as "dooring" and is a common cause of crashes in more congested areas. It is the responsibility of the driver to avoid opening a door into oncoming traffic.

These are only a few of many scenarios that bicyclists and motorists encounter. Remember, cyclists fare best when they act and are treated as drivers of vehicles.

This is the second in a series of articles about bicycling and bicycle safety. The author is affiliated with Sustainable Marblehead (<http://sustainablemarblehead.org>), BIKE Marblehead, MassBike (<http://massbike.org>), and is a League of American Bicyclists (LAB) Certified Instructor (<http://bikeleague.org>). Source material from LAB appears in this article.