

MARBLEHEAD REPORTER

Cycle Sense

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Have you heard that bicycles are the new toilet paper? In the past three months, sales of different styles of new bicycles increased 60% to 200%, and inventory in stores is low. Trying to get your bike tuned up? Local bike shops have backlogs of six to eight weeks. Since COVID-19, so many people realized that bicycling is ideal for solo and family recreation because it is an outdoor activity, and it is easy to maintain proper distancing. Plus, summer is almost here after a long, gray and damp spring!

Consequently, there are a lot of bicyclists on our streets and trails. Some are new riders. Many are returning riders that may have taken some years off. All of them are well-served by learning or refamiliarizing themselves with some basic bicycle safety practices.

A number of simple yet important safety measures ask the rider to be predictable. Most of them are familiar, but some may surprise you. And knowing the rules is not enough — you have to do them. The first rule of thumb: Ride where people expect to see you. Cyclists follow the rule of speed positioning, like automobiles. The slowest vehicles are generally the furthest to the right, not on the left and not riding on the opposite side of the street against traffic.

Another good rule is; Make your intentions clear to everyone on the road. Generally, this refers to arm signals for turning, slowing and stopping. You recognize them in the graphic.

An overlooked part of signaling is scanning the road prior to stopping or turning. Cyclists should look up ahead, to both sides and to the rear to check for vehicles, pedestrians, traffic signs and lights. Do it well in advance of turning or changing lanes. Just the action of turning your head to look behind is a clear signal the cyclist makes to other vehicles that he intends to do something. Using a mirror on your bicycle or helmet is not a substitute — cyclists must still look up, turn their head and scan completely before stopping and turning.

A common misconception among bicycle riders is that it is safer to follow the curb to avoid traffic, even if they have to move away from it frequently to move around parked cars. The preferred practice is to ride in a straight line, and don't swerve between cars. Simply put,

maintaining a straight line of travel is more predictable and safer than disappearing from sight by weaving between parked cars.

Avoid riding on sidewalks. Bicycling on sidewalks is another topic that deserves mention due to a lack of understanding about what is permitted and what is safe and predictable. Massachusetts law allows bicycles to be ridden on sidewalks outside of business districts when necessary in the interest of safety (in Marblehead, think younger children under supervision). Riding on sidewalks is not allowed as a general rule for good reason. Drivers turning or pulling out of narrow side streets and driveways often do not stop prior to crossing a sidewalk and are more focused on road traffic. Sidewalks are designed for pedestrian speed. Drivers are not expecting faster moving bicycles on the sidewalk to cross their path. For teenage and adult riders in our town, be safe, be predictable, stay off the sidewalks. For a short video on sidewalk riding safety, check out this link:
<https://bikeleague.org/content/riding-sidewalk>.

This is the third 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.