

Below is some great information about riding in groups. This is taken from the Arizona Bicycle Club's website:

[http://www.azbikeclub.com/content.aspx?page\\_id=22&club\\_id=53364&module\\_id=70986](http://www.azbikeclub.com/content.aspx?page_id=22&club_id=53364&module_id=70986) Credits for each section are listed.

Even if you've been cycling a long time and consider yourself a "seasoned" cyclist, this contains some GREAT and USEFUL information that may save you and your fellow riders from a serious accident.

One thing that is NOT addressed in these articles that SWBCC will address:

### **RIDING WITH EAR BUDS:**

#### **In a word: DON'T!**

- When you have your ears covered up or plugged with earphones or ear buds, you CANNOT hear other cyclists calling out potential hazards or turns.
- Listening to music via a headset while cycling tends to draw your focus away from your surroundings. By doing so, you endanger yourself as well as all the other riders around you.
- When you ride with a headset or ear buds, you CANNOT hear oncoming traffic.
- Ear buds, ear phones or other electronic devices, other than hearing aids, placed in your ears are prohibited on club rides. We expect you to be a focused rider and engaged at all times in your surroundings and the other riders on our club rides. It is NEVER acceptable to put yourself or others in danger by wearing a headset or ear buds on a group ride.

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Riding tips by Dick Fisher!

### **HOW TO RIDE IN A GROUP**

#### **Don't overlap wheels.**

If you get between two riders, slowly back out by coasting or sitting up to let your body catch some wind. This will slow you down without having to use the brakes. It also signals the rider behind that you are slowing. Riders behind you can't see

you touch the brakes but they will see you sit up. Remember, if you brake in the pack, then everyone has to brake accordingly.

**Don't ride centered on the wheel in front of you.**

You may ride close to the rider in front of you if that rider is steady, but always stay a few inches to one side. This will help you avoid colliding with that rider if he or she is forced to decelerate suddenly.

**Don't change position in the group.**

If you must change position, before you move to either side, make sure another rider is not overlapping you. **Don't** move abruptly. It is better to hit a hole than to swerve and cause a crash. If you are smooth and steady then everyone else will feel safer and riders near you may be able to react and avoid crashing. When cornering hold your line so other riders can follow through and maintain speed. Learn how to corner properly so the group does not get slowed very much.

**Don't ride the brakes.**

When you brake everyone behind you also must brake. This is normal if you come to a turn or stoplight, but if you are the only one braking then the group also has to brake and the rhythm is broken. Keep your hands near the brakes so you can brake if necessary but do so gradually. **Never brake hard.**

**Use caution when standing.**

When you stand to accelerate or climb the bike tends to hesitate. A rider behind you will not expect this and may touch your wheel and fall. Practice getting out of the saddle as one leg starts a down stroke and the bike is much less likely to hesitate and cause problems for riders behind you.

**Be aware.**

Always pay attention to the road and what vehicles around you are doing. Watch the road in front of you and as far ahead as you can see. There may be potholes or road grates that are hazardous. The lead rider should call out and identify these but may not do so. You must look out for yourself! Following riders should

call out approaching cars. At unmarked intersections lead riders should warn of oncoming traffic.

### **Do not run stop signs or red lights!**

### **Protect yourself.**

If you find yourself in a dangerous situation in a group, you should immediately start to work your way out. Don't ride in the middle of the pack unless you know the riders with you and are confident they are safe. Until you are experienced stay out of the main group and ride near the back. The safest places are the front or the back. The back is best because until you get the necessary experience you can observe the better riders and learn how to handle the bike. If other riders get too close either move away or ask them to move. When passing a rider closely inform them you are there by saying, "On your left" or "On your right" as the case may be.

By following the above rules everyone should have a safe and enjoyable ride.

## **HOW TO RIDE IN TRAFFIC**

**Be Seen!** This is probably the most important thing about riding in traffic. Wear bright clothing and use lights, reflectors and reflective clothing if riding after dark or in poor lighting conditions. Lights and reflectors are required by law for night riding. If drivers are not quickly aware that you are in the road then you are at risk. Bright clothing with lettering is good because drivers are looking for signs and words on your jersey make you more visible.

**Be predictable.** Always ride near the side of the road but not in the gutter. It is dangerous next to the curb because debris gets blown there and you have limited space to maneuver. Ride smooth and straight about two feet from the curb and drivers should see you and give you room. Always obey traffic laws. Stop at stop signs and red lights. Ride with traffic. A bicycle is a vehicle authorized to be on the road, but must obey laws as any other vehicle. Don't take undue risks. Don't move into the pedestrian crosswalk if you are traveling through the intersection. If you move right to get in the crosswalk then a driver may think you are going

right and turn behind you. Then when you move left to go through you are directly in front of the car!

**Choose your route.** If possible, find streets with little traffic. Use the intermediate streets that run between major arterials. Some of these streets will have bike lanes and will be much safer. Try not to ride during the heaviest traffic periods. If you commute find a route that may be longer but one that has little traffic.

**Be careful!** Always ride defensively and be aware of what is going on around you.

Scan the road ahead and look for cars that are moving in your path. Identify possible hazards. Predict potential problems. Look for driveways where cars may enter the road in front of you. If cars are parked on the side of the road watch for someone opening a door. If you are at an intersection and want to go through check for cars that are turning right. Always give cars the right of way. Never assume what a driver will do. After identifying any likely dangers decide what your response will be and then act on it.

### **Basic Traffic Skills for Cyclists by Heather Fowler**

Cultivating good traffic skills is as important to our development as road cyclists as is any other aspect of our training, and is vital to our safety on the road. In general, vehicular cycling is the safest and best model to follow. That is to say, **“Bicyclists fare best when we act and are treated as drivers of vehicles”**. -John Forester

To accomplish this, think like a vehicle and not a pedestrian. Ride with traffic, not against it. Follow the traffic laws - always. Stop at stop lights and stop signs. Signal your turns. Be predictable and steady. Be visible - wear high visibility colors, use lights after dusk and before sunrise, and choose the correct lane position when you ride.

**Lane choice and position within the lane:** Choose the right-most lane that goes in your direction of travel and ride as far to the right *as is practicable*. This means that slower traffic generally stays to the right of the faster traffic flow, just as if the bicycle were a big motor home or any other slow moving vehicle, but you can move to the left for left turns and to avoid obstacles or hazards and you can occupy the entire lane if it would be unsafe to share it. Generally, you should be

at least a foot from the road edge (give yourself more room at higher speeds) and about three feet to the right of motorized traffic.

On wide lanes, resist the urge to swing wide and follow the road edge. Instead, travel a straight line, keeping three to five feet to the right of motorized traffic. Staying in this position increases motorists' awareness of you and keeps you in a location where drivers expect to encounter other vehicles.

If the lane is too narrow for motorists to safely overtake you within the lane, ride further out in the lane ("take" the lane) to make it clear the motorist needs to either pass you in the other lane or slow behind you until it is safe to pass. Squeezing over to the very far right edge of the road in this situation may encourage unsafe passing and a sideswiping collision.

**Intersections and turns:** Several years ago, I rode for the first time with a good friend who was new to cycling. Her bike and helmet fit properly, she rode with traffic and stopped for stop signs and lights. We were riding on a street with one lane in each direction and a center turn lane. Everything seemed to be going along fine until we came to the first left turn on our route. I checked over my shoulder, signaled my movement out into the lane, moved into the lane, checked over my shoulder again and signaled my lane change into the left turn lane. As I turned left across the oncoming lane and into our destination street I was horrified to see my friend check over her shoulder and then dart across all three lanes. She rode against traffic about 50 feet, crossed the intersecting road from the wrong direction, then turned left onto that road. Luckily, cars saw and yielded to her and she wasn't killed right then and there. Along the same lines, I occasionally see cyclists at stoplights position themselves in the right turn only lane when their intent is to go straight through the intersection and do other things they wouldn't dream of doing in their cars.

Navigate intersections by "destination positioning" - position yourself in the right-most lane that leads to your intended destination. If you are traveling straight through the intersection, ride on the right side of the right-most through lane. Within a single destination turn lane (right turn only, left turn only) ride on the right side of the turn lane. Within a dual destination lane (left turn or straight through, right turn or straight through) mentally divide the lane into thirds and ride on the side of the lane which leads to your destination. For example, if you are on a road with a through lane, a dual destination (through or right turn) lane,

and a right turn only lane and you intend to travel straight through the intersection, you would position yourself in the left side of the dual destination lane. Doing otherwise puts you where traffic does not expect to find you and possibly into the path of turning cars.

If you are not comfortable making vehicular turns at the intersection, your other option is to get off your bike and walk across as a pedestrian, then remount and resume riding.

**Signaling** your intentions to other users of the road is a basic part of being visible and predictable and obeying traffic rules. Signal a left turn by extending your left arm straight out and a right turn by extending your right arm straight out. Signal stopping or slowing by extending your left arm straight down along your side with your hand flat, palm facing behind you. Always scan in your mirror and then look over your shoulder to be sure traffic is clear before changing your direction of travel or position in the lane.

**Road hazards:** Cross cattleguards and railroad tracks at a right angle to avoid catching your front wheel in a gap. Watch for and avoid the uneven pavement that sometimes borders these hazards.

Scan far enough down the road that you can avoid parked cars, potholes, rocks, glass, oil, etc. Generally, this will be at least 30 to 50 feet ahead. The faster you're going, the farther down the road you need to scan to give yourself more time to react.

**Group riding:** Cyclists can legally ride two abreast *where it is safe to do so*. Single up if necessary to facilitate traffic flow. At an intersection, the group should spread out a little to allow everyone to act as individuals, then re-group once everyone is through. Resist the urge to blow through stop signs as a pack, even if there is no other traffic. If you're in a large group, breaking up into several shorter pacelines will facilitate motorists' passing you better than one long paceline will.

Motorists notice large groups of cyclists more than a solitary rider. This is our chance to influence their perception of cyclists as a whole, for better or worse. For the good of all of us out there on the roadways, please always ride lawfully. Be safe. Set a good example to up and coming riders. Teach good riding habits by living them. Earn the respect of other road users by riding courteously and

predictably. We bolster our right to use the road when we take our responsibility to ride legally seriously.

I encourage all of our club members, seasoned cyclists and newcomers alike, to take one of the Road I courses set up by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB) and offered by our very own Arizona Bicycle Club. This course puts into action the principles outlined in this article and is a great way to develop more confidence with vehicular cycling.

References: Effective Cycling by John Forester

The Essential Cyclist by Arnie Baker, M.D.

Road Cycling Skills by Ed Pavelka and the editors of Bicycling magazine

[www.bikeleague.org](http://www.bikeleague.org) (LAB website)