SAME ROADS  SAME RULES  SAME RIGHTS

AAA’S GUIDE TO A SAFE BIKE RIDE
DRIVING A BICYCLE
Yes, bicyclists MUST drive their bicycles in the same manner that motorists drive their cars. Most people never think of it that way; yet it’s true.

SAME RIGHTS.
SAME RESPONSIBILITIES.
“Cyclists fare best when they act and are treated as drivers of vehicles.”
John Forrester, “Effective Cycling”

Bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as drivers of motor vehicles. This is the law in all 50 states. Sharing roads with motorists is safer when bicyclists drive legally and predictably, and when motorists treat bicyclists the same way they treat any other vehicle on the road.

RIDE READY
Just as a motorist should check the vehicle before driving, so too should a bicyclist. Bicyclists should:

• Be sure the bike “fits” properly
• Do the “ABC Quick Check” before every ride
• Carry repair supplies, such as a tube or patch kit, tire levers, and an air pump or CO2 cartridges
• Wear a helmet. It’s the law for children, but a great rule for everyone.

FOLLOW THE LAW
When approaching all traffic signs or signals, bicyclists and motorists must obey those controls. Stop means STOP.

The safest behavior for all is when everyone on the road obeys all traffic laws and controls. In New Jersey, all drivers must stop for pedestrians in a crosswalk. All intersections have crosswalks, even if they are not marked.

Bicyclists may use a full lane for travel. New Jersey law requires them to travel toward the right-hand side of the lane with the following exceptions:

• To pass a standing vehicle (leave at least 4 feet to that side);
• To make a left turn;
• To avoid debris or other hazards;
• To pass a slower-moving vehicle;
• When traveling at the same speed as other vehicles;
• To travel up to two abreast (only when it does not impede other traffic); and
• When safety is a risk.

Some towns pass municipal ordinances that are more restrictive than state laws. Drivers should become aware of all local laws.

BE PREDICTABLE
There are six basic rules of road use that all drivers must follow:

First come, first served. At a four-way stop, the driver that arrives first should be given the right-of-way to go first. When turning left, a driver must wait and yield to all vehicles entering the intersection.

TIP: Always give the right-of-way and never take the right-of-way without a double-check. The right-of-way can only be given and not taken.

Drive on the right. Bicyclists should always drive as far right as practicable in the same direction as other traffic. “Wrong-way” driving is a common cause of many crashes. Motorists do not expect other vehicles to be heading toward them, especially if those vehicles are near the side of the road.
When approaching an intersection, use the rightmost lane that serves your destination. If the right lanes becomes a right-turn only lane, bicyclists intending to go straight through the intersection should move left into the straight through lane.

Use turn signals. Communicate! Communicate! Communicate! The use of signals by both motorists and cyclists is critical. When preparing to make a turn, a bicyclist should:

- Scan to the front, sides and behind to see what traffic is present;
- Use the appropriate hand signal, and try to make eye contact with drivers of vehicles that may be a risk while completing the turn;
- Scan again to be sure it is safe to make a turn; then
- Make the turn safely.

These signals will make a bicyclists’ intentions clear to all surrounding motorists.

Bicyclists can communicate with motorists in other ways. They can divide the travel portion into thirds and use each third to convey a different message:

- **Turning left?** Taking the left one-third of the lane can indicate that.
- **Going straight?** Moving toward the center one-third of the lane can send that signal.
- **Turning right?** Moving to the right one-third of the lane can alert others of the intent to turn right.

Yield. In many situations, drivers must yield. Some examples are as follows:

- When a yield sign is present;
- When entering or crossing a major road;
- When changing lanes;
- When an emergency vehicle approaches;
- When making a turn; or
- When pedestrians are present.
Slower moving vehicles must stay to the right. Slow-moving traffic stays to the right and lets other pass. Passing vehicles move to the left to pass. Bicyclists should never pass on the right except under the following conditions:

- When traveling in another marked lane (multiple lane road);
- When vehicles are at a complete stop to turn left and there is room to do so safely; or
- When in a designated bicycle travel lane.

Note that the first two apply to all drivers. Even in those special circumstances, bicyclists should proceed with extreme caution. Motorists often change their minds, so bicyclists should expect the unexpected! Passing on the right is a contributing factor in many bicyclist/motorist crashes. Motorists making a right turn do not expect to see another vehicle passing or traveling on their right. They may turn right into the path of a bicyclist that is intending to go straight ahead, even if the bicyclist is in a bike lane. Adjusting speed and distance can keep as much open space to the left as possible. This will allow room to move and help avoid driving in other vehicles’ blind spots.

SIDEWALK USE
Sidewalks are for pedestrians. Although state law doesn’t prohibit bicyclists from driving on sidewalks, some municipalities have ordinances that prohibit it in select areas. Bicyclists should be aware of local laws regarding the use of the sidewalk.

While not illegal, this practice can be very dangerous for many reasons. Driving on the sidewalk places both the cyclist and pedestrians at greater risk. Often there is less room to maneuver safely due to many obstacles. Sudden movements by either the bicyclist or pedestrian can cause a crash.

New Jersey law states that bicyclists should always yield to pedestrians. When biking on a sidewalk, your speed must be much lower than on streets. There is danger at every intersection or driveway. Motorists do not expect to see bicyclists on sidewalks. However, in most areas where bicycling on sidewalks is prohibited, children are usually permitted to use them.

BE CONSPICUOUS
Bicyclists must be visible! Bicyclists often do not think of their own visibility. Many who drive their bikes to work or around town may just jump on their bikes in whatever clothes they happen to be wearing. Adding a reflective or high-visibility vest can help others see them. A variety of highly-reflective materials are available. Bicyclists traveling longer distances can choose a brightly-colored jersey as well.
Visible! Visible! Visible! Many types of lights can be purchased to illuminate bicyclists’ helmets, pedals, wheels, legs, gloves and bodies. New Jersey law requires a front headlight and rear red light, both visible at 500 feet, for driving at night. Additional reflectors and lights, although optional, are recommended.

Another way bicycles can be more visible is to use more of the lane. Driving too far to the right makes them less likely to be seen by other drivers and is therefore less safe. This is especially true when driving at night or in inclement weather.

THINK AHEAD

Bicyclists, like motorists, must anticipate what other drivers might do. Looking up the road — using a 20 to 30 second visual lead (10 mph equals approximately one block) — can help identify possible hazards ahead. Paying attention to small details may reveal what another driver is planning. A motorist stopped at a light may turn the wheel slightly. This may indicate an intention to turn when the light changes, even if no turn signal is on. A parked vehicle with brake or reverse lights on may indicate the vehicle is preparing to pull out into traffic or the door may open for a driver’s exit.

Anticipate! Recognize! Adjust! A car door opening in a bicyclists’ path can cause a serious crash. To avoid the “door zone,” a minimum of four feet of space should be maintained when passing parked cars. Potholes, poor pavement and other road hazards may require a bicyclist to move further out into the lane.

“Sweeping” is when motor vehicles driving on the road push debris to the sides. Small pieces of glass, metal and gravel can cause a fall or a flat tire. Puddles can independently cause falls and may hide other hazards. Bicyclists should always scan for these conditions. In addition, they must keep track of the traffic around them in order to react quickly and avoid hazards.

KEEP YOUR COOL

Sometimes motorists will do or say things in anger when they pass a bicyclist. This is known as road rage. Drivers shouldn’t let someone else’s bad behavior ruin their day. If a fellow driver exhibits signs of road rage, the best response is no response. Any engagement can lead to very serious consequences. Try not to make eye contact. Ignore the angry driver. It is important to keep calm and keep going! If the aggression continues, drive to a safe area, such as a police or fire station, a shopping area or anywhere there are lots of people.

ALWAYS THINK SAFETY

How can a bicycle driver remember all of this? Keep this simple question in mind:

“Would you drive your car like that?”

The answer to that question can almost always provide the solution.

For more details and information, read the “New Jersey Bicycling Manual,” which can be found online: nj.gov/transportation/commuter/bike/pdf/bicyclingmanual.pdf
NATIONAL RESOURCES

AAA
SharetheRoad.AAA.com

League of American Bicyclists
bikeleague.org

International Mountain Bicycling Association
imba.com

Adventure Cycling
adventurecycling.org

NEW JERSEY RESOURCES

New Jersey Bicycle Law
nj.gov/transportation/commuter/bike/regulations.shtm

Bicycling Clubs
nj.gov/transportation/commuter/bike/bikeclubs.shtm

Advocacy
newjerseybikewalk.org

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