

# TRAFFIC LAWS AND BILLINGS BICYCLISTS

## BASICS OF STATE LAW

**“Every person operating a bicycle shall be granted all of the rights and shall be subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of any other vehicle...”**

This means:

- Stop at stop signs and red lights.
- Comply with all traffic signs .
- Ride with the flow of traffic.
- Use lights at night.
- Yield the right-of-way when entering the roadway.
- Yield to pedestrians at marked or unmarked crosswalks .

**NOTE: These laws apply when you are riding in bike lanes and in regular traffic lanes.**

Many cyclists don't believe that these laws apply to them. These cyclists are wrong. They can, and will be ticketed for breaking traffic laws.

The law doesn't just give cyclists duties. It confers rights as well. These rights include equal status with other vehicle drivers –the right to use the road responsibly – and legal protection in court. A motorist is required by law to yield right-of-way to a bicyclist just as he or she would to another motorist.

## RELEVANT LAWS

**Helmets** are required by riders under the age of 16.

**Locks.** Bikes are to be locked when left unattended.

**Registration.** Cyclists who live in Billings or ride regularly within the city limits are encouraged to register their bikes. You can register your Bike by contacting the COP Shop @ 247-8590 . They can send you out a form or you can get one at the local bike shops.

**Road Position.** Cyclists are required to ride as close as practicable to the right hand curb or edge of the roadway. There are exceptions. For example, when you are going the speed of traffic, you can move to the middle of the lane. And, if you intend to make a left turn, you can move left and do so just like a car. On roads where the lanes are too narrow to safely share, you can move out from the curb to avoid being sideswiped. Also, if the surface near the right edge is hazardous (e.g., covered with gravel or parked cars or full of potholes), you can ride far enough to the left to avoid the hazard. And, you can move to the left to pass another vehicle. On one-way streets, you can ride as close as practicable to the left hand curb or edge of the roadway.

**Signaling turns.** Cyclists must signal their turns: left hand and arm held straight out for a left turn. For a right turn, right hand and arm held straight out, or do the usual left arm out and bent upright at the elbow.

**Lights at night.** It is required by law that you have a headlight and a rear reflector when riding at night. Lights at night help you see hazards on the road, AND help motorists see you !!

**Sidewalk riding.** In Billings, riding on sidewalks is legal. No one may ride on the sidewalks in business districts, except the bike cops.

**Making Left Turns.** You have three legal options for making a left turn. The first is to do it just like a car would: look behind for traffic, signal your intentions, move left when clear, and then make your left turn.

The second is to ride straight across the intersection, stop on the right side, turn your bike to the left, wait for traffic to clear or for the light to change, and then ride across to the left.

Third, you can get off and walk your bike across in the crosswalk just like a pedestrian.

**Riding side-by-side.** In most situations, it is illegal to ride any other way except single-file. If you are riding on

a striped shoulder or in a parking lane, you may ride two abreast. You can pass another bicyclist on the left when it is safe to do so. On a road with four or more lanes, you can ride two abreast in the right lane if you can do so without impeding traffic any more than you would by riding single file.

**Passing cars on the right.** Passing on the right is illegal, except when the car in front of you is turning left. If there is an accident, it is the fault of the person doing the passing.

## COMMON SENSE

**Ride Predictably.** Ride in a straight line and do not weave in and out between parked cars. The more predictable you are, the more drivers will respect you.

**Establish Eye Contact with Drivers.** Seeing a driver is not enough. Be sure drivers see you.

**Look for Drivers in Parked Cars.** Be ready for a car door to open or the car to move out into traffic.

**Be Visible.** Wear brightly colored clothing. At night, use reflective materials and lights. Ride where traffic can see you.

**COURTESIES:** Be courteous to drivers. Help them learn that bicyclists are responsible and respectful users of the roadway. Give them the right of way when it makes sense. Don't gloat just because you travel by bike and they don't. Maybe soon they will follow your good example and ride!

# Foul Weather

**Cold Weather:** Pay particular attention to your feet, head, and hands; these tend to get cold while cycling during winter. Layers of gloves and mittens, a wool hat under your helmet, and wool socks and warm boots can help.

Unless you plan to ride a long distance, you won't have to do much to keep your torso warm. Dress like you would for cross-country skiing; wear clothes that cut the wind but that don't let you overheat. If you plan to ride less than a mile or two, you can wear a down jacket as long as you ride slowly and don't exert much; otherwise you'll get too hot.

**Rain:** Watch out for slick surfaces; motor oil can be a problem until the rain washes it away. And, paint stripes can be very slippery. Take corners slowly and don't cross crosswalk stripes while leaning.

Avoid puddles because you may not know how deep they are. Some equipment that will make rain riding more pleasant:

- Fenders will keep the "rooster tail" from hitting your backside and will cut down the spray that soaks your shoes.
- Special brake pads will cut your stopping distance dramatically.
- Aluminum alloy rims give much better braking than steel rims.
- To keep dry, you need a good raincoat or poncho, a pair of rain pants, and a good pair of rain "booties".
- Keep papers, books, etc. dry with a waterproof saddlebag, or even a large plastic bag over your backpack.

During a real downpour, it's often best to stick to the quiet streets. Passing motorists often raise a wave of water that will soak you from the side; on quiet streets, there will be less passing traffic and the cars may be going more slowly.

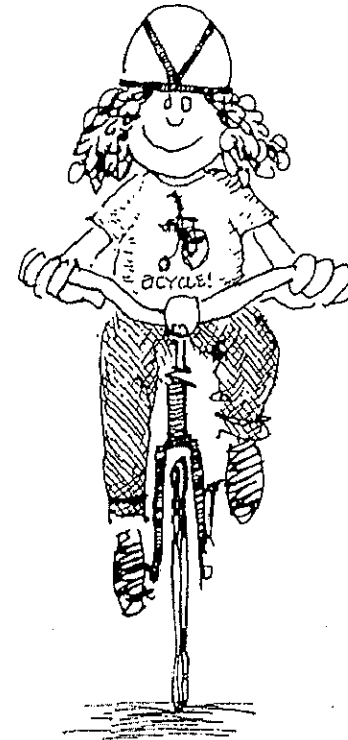
**Snow:** Riding in snow is best done on a bike with wide, low pressure tires, like a one-speed "bomber bike". Fenders can be a nuisance as the snow tends to pack under them. Balance is very important when riding through snow because a blanket of snow can cover a smooth layer of ice. If you are upright, you may simply slide a bit; if you aren't well balanced on your bike, you could go down. For this reason, upright handlebars are nice for winter riding.

Winter riding will test your smoothness on the bike. If you pedal easily and can track a straight line, snow and ice riding can be fun. Plan your stops in advance and watch out when you put your foot down -- it may skate out from under you.

**Note:** If motorists are slipping and sliding all over, it may be best for you to take a back street or walk. Even if you can get good traction, it won't help if a car is sliding sideways toward you at 35 mph.

**Another note:** Some cyclists use "studded snow tires" for winter riding. These are made by pushing sheet metal screws or roofing nails through the tire from the inside. The tips are then cut off and the tube is protected by a durable strip of rubber or other material. For more information on making snow tires, contact a local bike shop.

# DO YOU KNOW BILLINGS' BICYCLE LAWS?



City of Billings  
Alternate Transportation Modes Office  
247-8637