

# SUCCESSFUL BIKE RIDING--A FEW POINTERS

Summary: Be Seen. Be predictable. Be alert.

## I. Equipment.

- ◆ Bike fit
- ◆ Seat
- ◆ Brakes
- ◆ Spokes
- ◆ Tires
- ◆ Chain
- ◆ Reflectors
- ◆ Light
- ◆ Clothing
- ◆ Toe clips
- ◆ Baggage and carriers
- ◆ HELMET
- ◆ Lock
- ◆ Bike Registration
- ◆ Mirror

## II. Visibility

- ◆ Wear clothing to assure visibility
- ◆ Reflectorized strips, packs
- ◆ Road position (see below)

## III. Traffic rules

- ◆ A bicycle is a vehicle per Montana law; must obey all traffic laws and customs.
- ◆ Obey stop signs and stop lights.
- ◆ Signal before turning.
- ◆ Use headlight at night. Good idea to have taillight too.
- ◆ Yield to pedestrians and runners.
- ◆ Biking permitted on sidewalks, but **NOT** in the “**business district**”.
- ◆ Helmets required for riders under the age of 16.
- ◆ Must ride as far to the right of the road as practical.

## IV. Interaction with other roadway users.

- ◆ Smile, nod, make eye contact with other roadway users, especially motorists.
- ◆ Avoid gestures and actions which will inflame or irritate motorists.
- ◆ Avoid giving clues which are confusing to motorists. E.g. When approaching an intersection to go straight through, slowing down suggests to a motorist that you are going to turn.

## V. Road position.

### *On any roadway:*

- ◆ Keep as far to the right as you reasonably can to allow cars going faster than you to pass, BUT not so far right that motorists don't give you the right to use the road.
- ◆ Right outside of the swing distance of parked-car doors.
- ◆ Don't ride in and out of the parking lane.
- ◆ Don't ride at the very edge of the road; this tells motorists that you are an “extra” on the road and encourages them to turn right in front of you at intersections. And, the very edge of the road is often littered, full of holes or broken pavement edges...unsafe.
- ◆ Generally, ride at the right edge of the straight-ahead lane.
- ◆ Your road position is determined by where you are going next (turn right, straight, turn left) AND your speed compared to the auto traffic (the closer your speed is to traffic, the more you should ride in traffic).

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### *When turning right:*

- ◆ Be in the right turn lane if there is one; turn from the center of this lane. Turning from the very right edge of this lane risks cars pushing you into the curb as they pass you.
- ◆ If there is no separate right turn lane, turn from the right half of the driving lane, so that right-turning cars must follow you around the corner and cannot turn right between you and the curb nor can pass you. After getting around the corner, be sure to move right to allow other turning cars to go by.
- ◆ Approaching the intersection, be sure to signal your intention and get into the correct position for turning well before the actual corner. You don't want to be forced to turn from a poor position.

### *When turning left:*

- ◆ As if you were a car, turn from the correct lane position.
- ◆ With a separate left turn lane, move to the left-turn lane, then turn left from the right side of the left-turn lane. If then you are going straight, you are in the correct position to go straight.
  - ◆ Exception: If you are turning left again after making a left turn, make the first left turn from the left side of the first left turn lane so you will be in position to turn left again without having to change lane position.
- ◆ With no separate left turn lane (i.e., with a lane that is both straight and left-turn): turn from the center of the lane so that no left-turning car can pass you on the turn but cars going straight can get by you.

### *When going straight:*

- ◆ Be in the lane for going straight. DO NOT be in the right hand lane if the right lane is a right turn lane.
- ◆ Go straight from the right side of the straight ahead lane. NOTE: Do not be so far to the right of the lane that cars are encouraged to pass you in the intersection.
- ◆ Occupy enough of the straight ahead lane that cars must follow you through the intersection, then move to the right a bit.

## VI. Riding behavior.

- ◆ ALWAYS be scanning around you...right, left, up, down, behind.
- ◆ Ride with traffic always. NEVER ride opposite the direction of traffic.
- ◆ Ride in a straight line. Don't swerve and weave in and out. When you ride straight, motorists know what to expect and can drive more safely past you.
- ◆ Ride single file in almost all situations. Exceptions: wide parking lane with no cars in it, two lanes of traffic in one direction you can ride two abreast in the right hand lane as long as it won't impede any automobiles.
- ◆ Watch for road hazards: gravel, holes, railroad crossings (turn slightly to cross the tracks at a right angle). STEER GRADUALLY around hazards. Avoid having to do an emergency swerve.
- ◆ Watch for motorist hazards. Common problems: a car turning left in front of an oncoming cyclist, car failing to stop at cross street and pulling in front of cyclist, and car passing a cyclist on the left then pulling to the right directly across the path of the cyclist. Watch car tires to see change in car direction. Watch through rear window for drivers in parked cars. Watch tail lights of both parked and moving cars to detect changes in car position.
- ◆ At a red light or stop sign, DO NOT pass the cars in the line on the right.
- ◆ At a red light or stop sign, keep you place in the traffic line. Allow cars turning right to pass you on the right.
- ◆ In traffic, ride with hands ready at the brakes.

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- ◆ When riding with a group, make your own road position and intersection choices based on what YOU see. Don't just follow the group through an intersection.
- ◆ Ride so you can see other hazards...such as into driveways from which cars or dogs or kids might suddenly emerge.
- ◆ Plan to skillfully change lanes when you ride, so you can be in correct position for intersections. Change lanes at least a half-block in advance; give a full arm signal, watch for opportunities, change lanes with full respect for motorists.
- ◆ When riding, always be thinking: Can every driver see me?

### VII. Skills.

- ◆ Looking behind without swerving.
- ◆ Dodging road obstacles.
- ◆ Emergency stops.
- ◆ Emergency turns

### VIII. Special conditions.

#### Riding at night.

- ◆ Use effective headlights, reflectors. Good idea to have flashing rear light.
- ◆ Wear visible clothing, reflectorized,
- ◆ Remember you can't see hazards as well as in the day.
- ◆ Plan to take longer for the same distance so you can ride a bit more slowly.
- ◆ Remember that you may be less visible to motorists. (Some people believe that the sight of good flashing rear lights and moving reflectors, with adequately reflectorized clothing and pedals, encourages more caution by motorists. This is true for motorists who do see you.)

#### Riding in the rain.

- ◆ Remember that you WILL NOT HAVE as much traction so ride much more slowly and carefully.
- ◆ Double your caution and visibility at intersections.
- ◆ Be especially alert for oil and gas on the road surface. When oil and gas get rained on, they are extremely slippery.
- ◆ Fenders keep you from getting wet from the road.
- ◆ In heavy rain, avoid major streets.

#### Riding in groups.

- ◆ Make your own individual decisions about the best road position for you in each traffic situation.
- ◆ Ride single file, or when permissible two abreast. Never more.
- ◆ If you need to chat with a group, pull over.
- ◆ Cross intersections so that automobile traffic can proceed too.
- ◆ Be wary of turning your head and shoulders to talk to a buddy along side or behind you...and thus turning your handlebars.
- ◆ Remember that well-behaved groups of bicyclists can generate respect by motorists. Poor traffic manners by a group of bicyclists WILL generate motorist anger.

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**Information Sheet Courtesy of Missoula Bicycle Pedestrian Office**