
Advocacy Column

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Legislative update:

Two bills affecting bicyclists were considered this session. At this writing one has passed, the other awaits the Governor's signature.

The first, Senator Marc Cote's bill S 134 sub. A, to repeal the legislation that passed last year (2006 session) was transmitted to the Governor on June 29, 2007. As of July 10 there has been no action from the Governor on the bill. Cote's bill repealed last year's bill that required everyone on bike paths to walk and ride on the right, rather than Rhode Island's original regulations requiring users to walk on left, ride on the right.

[Ed note: At press time we learned that Cote's bill S-134 sub A had become effective without the Governor's signature, thus bike paths stay with the former rule of walk on left, ride on right.]

There has been a lot of discussion on the NBW Topica email discussion list about this bill. The consensus is that Rhode Island's walk on left, bike on right is the right way to travel on a bikeway. Walk and ride on right is dangerous on crowded multi use paths. Walkers cannot see the cyclist, skate boarder, or roller blader coming up behind. If the walker is not paying attention, (and most aren't), walking with a young child or with a pet on a long leash, or plugged into a headset of some sort, the cyclist is left with only his or her quick reactions and a loud voice to avoid accidents. The Topica discussion included stories of crashes that occurred because of overcrowded bikeway conditions and people who were busy doing many other things besides paying attention to people coming up behind them.

A July 1, 2007 article in the Boston Globe, "Rage on the Bikeway, walkers and cyclists clash on the Minuteman path" cites the same conflicts we have in Rhode Island as a result of crowds and users with conflicting needs.

Some trails, such as the Washington and Old Dominion Trails in Virginia have posted speed limits supplemented by volunteers who hand out warnings to speeders going over 15 mph. Unlike Rhode Island, the rules for Massachusetts trail users are stay to the right. Massachusetts users have coined a new term, bikeway rage, to describe the results of crowding and the needs of conflicting users. On a summer day the issue is not which side you must travel on, it's the success of greenways as community socializing centers.

House bill H 5446 sub. A introduced by Rep. Joe McNamara became effective without the Governor's signature on June 30. The bill requires that any person fifteen (15) years of age or younger who is operating or who is a passenger on a bicycle or who is using or operating a skateboard, roller skates, scooter or inline skates on a public highway, bicycle trail or path, shared use path, park and/or recreational area, school property or on any other public right of way must wear a helmet.

The bill also requires that no bicycle shall be used to carry more persons at one time than the number for which it is designed or equipped, except that a rider may carry a child securely attached to his or her person in a back pack or sling when transporting a child six (6) years of age or younger in a rear-mounted bicycle carrier and/or trailer that meets mandatory and various industry standard specifications as developed by the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM).

You can check the status of any bill at:
[//dirac.rilin.state.ri.us/BillStatus/WebClass1.ASP?](http://dirac.rilin.state.ri.us/BillStatus/WebClass1.ASP?)

How to ride on NBW rides

Pass on the left

Pass other riders on the left, not on the right. Passing on the right is dangerous. Riders don't expect you to be there, are startled and the instinct is to pull right—i.e., into your wheel. Or they could be moving right themselves to the side of the road to stop, in which case you have no business trying to sneak through on the right. (Of course, some thoughtless folks ride in the middle of the road and sometimes you have to tell them you're forced to pass on their right rather than go onto the other side of the road, that will be a future Reminder box!)

Alert riders before you pass

A quick "On your left" before you pass a rider is not only courteous, it's safest.

How many of us have been so startled by a pace line flying by the handlebars without warning that we've had to fight not to swerve?

And don't cut in once you think you're past—don't forget that rider might be a bit slower than you but is still moving and will either have to brake or hit your back wheel.

Move right only when you know you're well clear.