
Advocacy Column

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Rhode Island's driver's manual ignores the rights of cyclists

The Rhode Island Driver's Manual includes a short section on bicycle riders, including an introductory statement that "Bicycle riders are given the same rights and must obey the same laws as drivers of automobiles". The section continues with four bullet point instructions for bicyclists including the statement "When there is a safe bicycle path near the roadway, riders should use the path rather than the road". The section ends with one bullet point for automobile drivers. "Motor vehicle drivers must be alert and cautious for bicycle riders in or near the street." The entire driver's manual in PDF format is on the web at:

www.dmv.ri.gov/documents/manuals/DM_Eng.pdf

The paragraph for bicycle riders is on page 35.

Curious to see if other states were equally dismissive of cyclists, I surfed the web sites of other New England states, California, Colorado, Oregon, Texas and Washington to learn what instructions are included in other driver's manuals to give motorists adequate knowledge to safely and legally share the road with bicyclists. It is an interesting mix, ranging from Rhode Island's five bullet point section, aimed primarily at bicyclists, to comprehensive sections in Oregon and Washington State manuals that reflect an awareness of the rights of bicyclists and appropriate motorist behavior to make the roads safe for everyone. In comparison, Rhode Island's manual is simply pathetic.

In some form all manuals state that bicyclists have the same rights and must obey the same laws as motorists. Massachusetts includes rules for bicyclists with scant mention of motorists' responsibilities. Other states go further than Massachusetts and Rhode Island's concentration on cyclist behavior to include reasonable instructions for drivers. Connecticut, California, Colorado, Maine, Texas, Oregon, Vermont, and Washington all include rules for motorists to share the road with bicyclists.

Connecticut's driver's manual concentrates on responsibilities for motorists, including slowing down and watching for potholes, drain grates, narrow bridges or roadways, and obstacles in the road that may be hazardous to cyclists, and giving them room to maneuver. The manual directs motorists to avoid honking at cyclists to avoid startling them. They emphasize care around children on bicycles with good reasoning: children are unpredictable,

lack a sense of danger, don't see things out of the corner of their eyes as well as adults, have trouble judging speed and distance of oncoming cars, and believe adult drivers will look out for them.

Vermont includes rules for sharing the road with bicyclists plus a section on specific actions that might result in drivers colliding with bicyclists. That list includes turning left or right into bicyclists without noticing them, entering street crosswalks without checking for cyclists and opening a vehicle door into the path of a cyclist. The manual follows up with tips for bicyclists including illustrations of correct turning signals, how to cross railroad tracks, headlight use for night riding, and correct helmet fit.



Oregon and Washington driver's manuals are the most comprehensive. A complete synopsis of the important points included in these manuals would increase the length of

this column far beyond the allotted space in this newsletter. That review will come in the next *Spoke N Word*. If you can't wait for the next issue and you have a free moment, visit their web sites to learn the approach of states that welcome cyclists and fully agree with our rights to the road.

Oregon: www.dmvusa.com/mcontent.php?pageid=4&id=Oregon_Driver_Manual, pages 76-78

Washington: www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/guide.html, pages 78-82

"On your left" How to pass other riders

Please alert other riders as you are about to pass them. Not only is it the polite thing to do, it's the safest way to pass. If you startle the rider by passing without alerting them you run the risk of them swerving into you.

We have been astonished recently by the number of riders who don't appear to know the etiquette of group riding.

Pass on the left—only on the left—and alert by saying "On your left" or "Passing on your left".