

Road rules for cyclists

The golden rule: courtesy and safety always

When driving any vehicle – whether car, truck, or bicycle – the golden rule is to treat other road users with respect and courtesy. All road users should drive or ride safely and obey the traffic rules at all times.

Cyclists must respect the rights of other users to use roads and paths if we are to expect the same courtesy in return.

New road rules

Victorian road rules were revamped in December 1999 as part of an Australia-wide standardisation of rules. Visit www.vicroads.vic.gov.au for details.

The State Government plans to increase fines for cyclists, to bring them into line with other road users. Bicycle Victoria supports this.

The basic rules

Bicycles are vehicles, and are therefore required to comply with the same traffic laws as motorists. The road rules apply to roads and road-related areas such as shared paths.

Cyclists must:

- Obey all traffic signals and signs.
- Ride as near as practicable to the far left side of the road. Bicycle Victoria suggests riding a metre out from kerbside obstructions such as parked cars or the kerb itself.
- Have at least one effective brake and a warning device such as a bell on their bikes.
- Ride the bike facing forward with at least one hand on the handlebars.
- Wear an approved bicycle helmet securely fitted.
- Have lights and reflectors for riding at night or in low-visibility conditions. Rear lights must be red and front lights white. Both lights must be visible for at least 200m and can be flashing or steady. Bikes must also have a rear reflector visible at 50m.
- Keep to the left and give way to pedestrians on shared pathways.
- Ride in bicycle lanes where they are marked on the roads.
- Use a hand signal when turning right.
- Not ride more than two abreast on a road unless overtaking other riders. When riding two abreast riders must be no more than 1.5m apart.
- Not ride within 2m of the rear of a moving vehicle for more than 200m or hold onto a moving vehicle.
- Not ride across a road on a children's crossing, marked foot crossing or pedestrian crossing.

Other rules

Other rules that relate to cyclists include:

- Overtaking to the left. Unlike other vehicles, cyclists may pass to the left of a vehicle unless it is turning left and signaling left.
- Hook turns. Cyclists may make a hook turn at any intersection unless signs specifically prohibit it.
- Riding in emergency stopping lanes. Cyclists may ride in emergency stopping lanes unless signs specifically prohibit it.
- Riding on freeways. Cyclists may ride on a freeway unless signs specifically prohibit it.
- Edge lines. Cyclists may ride to the left of a continuous white edge line.
- Riding on a footpath. Cyclists under 12 may ride on the footpath provided they keep left and give way to pedestrians.
- Roundabouts. Cyclists may make a right turn at a multi-lane roundabout from either the left lane or the right lane. If choosing to make the turn from the left lane, cyclists must give way to vehicles crossing their path to leave the roundabout.
- Towing children in bicycle trailers. Cyclists 16 or older may tow someone in a proper bike trailer provided the person is under 10 and wearing a helmet (see *BVnews*, February 2001).

Rules for motor vehicles as they relate to bicycles

Opening car doors

Rules 269 (3) states "A person must not cause a hazard to any person or vehicle by opening a door of a vehicle, leaving a door of a vehicle open, or getting off, or out of, a vehicle". The penalty is 2 penalty units.

Cars giving way to bikes

Specific rules apply as to who has to give way when a bike (either in a bike lane or riding along the edge of the road) is going straight ahead and a car is turning left. The vehicle that is further behind must give way. If a car ahead of the cyclist indicates a left hand turn the cyclist must let the car make the left hand turn. Rule 141 (2) refers to bicycles not overtaking on the left side of vehicles indicating that they are turning left.

If the cyclist is ahead of the car, the car must wait for the cyclist. A car driver who speeds up and tries to cut in front of the cyclists is in effect breaking rule 144. Rule 144 refers to motorist overtaking: they must keep a safe distance and not cause a collision with the vehicle they are overtaking (e.g. a bicycle) or obstruct the path of that vehicle.

Drinking and riding

This is the response from Victoria Police on drunk riding:

"The provisions of the Road Safety Act, 1986, relating to drink driving refer to the drivers or riders of motor vehicles. A bicycle in its true sense does not fall into the category of a motor vehicle. Some of the power assisted bicycles can and do fall into this category, but not the standard pedal powered model.

Therefore the provisions relating to Preliminary Breath Tests and 0.00% or 0.05% do not apply to the riders of bicycles. There is still an offence in the Summary Offences Act, 1966, of being drunk in charge of a carriage, and the definition of carriage can be extended to include bicycle."

Improving the Road Rules

Bicycle Victoria supports sensible improvements to the road rules to help cyclists. These include:

- Making footpath cycling legal for all ages except in busy or narrow pedestrian areas.
- Allowing cyclists to ride on pedestrian crossings.
- Requiring motorists to leave at least 1m when overtaking cyclists.

Bicycle Victoria has also called for a review of other potential changes that will benefit cyclists, including allowing cyclists to turn left at red lights after giving way, and to treat stop signs as give-ways.

All these rules operate successfully in other states and countries.