

Tram Tracks – how to cross them

Trams are unique to Melbourne* and tram tracks are a unique hazard for cyclists.

If your bicycle wheel, especially the front wheel, slips or gets caught on tram tracks it can result in a nasty fall. The key to dealing with tram tracks is to cross them at a right angle in an upright position, avoid braking and move your weight back on the saddle. The skills apply to all slippery surfaces including tram tracks and are especially important in the wet when things are extra slippery.

As for other road riding skills, the key is looking ahead and planning your actions. Look ahead for tram tracks and select your travel line and actions beforehand rather than having to bail out at the last moment and risk putting yourself in a hazardous situation.

Situations that may require you to cross tram tracks include:

- Making a right hand turn
- Going around obstacles including double parked cars
- Crossing tram tracks at an intersection
- Crossing tram tracks at a tram siding or tram depot when the tram tracks go from the middle to the side of the road

The correct angle is the right angle



The best angle to cross tram tracks is at right angles - as shown

The two most common tram track crashes are:

1. The front wheel sliding out from under you on the tracks, and
2. One or both wheels getting caught in the tracks.

The key to avoiding both is to cross the tracks as close as possible to a right angle - avoid crossing tram tracks while travelling parallel or near to parallel to the tracks.

Start your turn before you cross the tram tracks so you are in an upright position and not actually turning when you cross the tracks.

So if you are travelling along a road with tram tracks and want to cross that road the best thing is to make sure you leave enough room to make the crossing or turn at right angles to the tracks and in an upright position. Its best to wait for a big enough gap in traffic so you can start your turn from far enough left to get the right angle and cross both the tram tracks and all streams of traffic in one go. Sometimes this may mean pulling off to the left first and waiting for a big enough gap.

When trams turn at road intersections the tracks take a long arc around the corner. This means you may find yourself crossing the tracks at less than a right angle. Don't panic – just stay off the brakes, move your weight back on the saddle and “coast” over

the tracks at the biggest angle possible (try for more than a 45 degree angle to the tracks).

Stay off the brakes and move your weight back

When crossing tram tracks, stay off the brakes, stop pedalling and move your weight back on the saddle while you “coast” over the tracks. This minimises the chance of your wheels slipping on the tracks.

If you have to slow down, do your braking before and after you cross the tram tracks. Whatever you do, stay off the front brakes because if your front wheel slips you will lose control of the bike and risk a nasty fall. Moving your bum back on the saddle will also take some weight off the front wheel and reduce the chances of it slipping.

The same applies for acceleration. Don't try and accelerate over tram tracks or your wheels are likely to slip.

Watch out for trams

Sounds obvious but it has to be said. Don't forget to look for trams when crossing tram tracks. Sometimes when cycling on the road you may get too focused on cars and trucks and can forget about trams. Trams can hide behind other trams as can cars and trucks, so make sure both directions are clear before crossing tram tracks. Pay particular attention when crossing behind a tram as it can hide trams and vehicles travelling in the opposite direction.

Stop for tram passengers and stay off the tracks

Bicycles, as legal road vehicles, are required like all other vehicles to stop behind trams that have stopped on the road to pick up or drop off passengers (see road rules 163 & 164).

Though it may be tempting at times to travel down the middle of tram tracks, especially in the inner city when traffic is backed up, it is both illegal (see road rules 155 & 158) and dangerous. You especially risk being side swiped by a vehicle making a right hand turn or u-turn. So don't do it.

So ride sensibly, look ahead and anticipate. Remember: right angles; no brakes; and weight back, and you're on track.

* OK, we know there are trams in Glenelg SA and Bendigo Vic

B Sbeghen, 14 July 2004