MassDOT RMV
Reaching for Increased Safety

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RMV Works to Influence Safe Driving Behavior

- The RMV’s Driver’s Manual is a reference guide to educate motorists how to share the road safely.
- The RMV has worked to more prominently feature the importance of sharing the road.

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Sharing the Road
A User’s Manual for Public Ways

Most public ways, including urban streets, country lanes, main roads, secondary roads, and suburban or rural roads, are meant to be shared by all of us. “Us” includes pedestrians, persons riding on bicycles or motorcycles, persons riding in passenger vehicles or buses, and persons operating commercial motor vehicles or trailers, or combinations of those vehicles. Some ways, such as interstate highways and expressways, are designed exclusively for use by motor vehicles and trailers traveling at high speeds. Other public ways are specifically designed for slower speeds or for travel by lighter vehicles and may restrict or prohibit certain vehicles. Public ways come in various lengths and widths with various features: one-way, two-way, multiple lanes, High Occupancy Vehicle lanes (HOV), center dividers, sidewalks, bicycle lanes, and hard or soft shoulders. However, the public way is laid out, it is meant to be used by people and the various types of vehicles that may propel them along if they are not on foot.

Although the bulk of this Manual provides information about the use of public ways for motor vehicles and trailers, the goal of the RMV in producing it is to make all users of public ways aware that our public streets and roads are meant to be shared except where the law provides for limited uses. Bicycling and walking may be used in conjunction with transit, so always pay attention.

Sharing the Road with Bicycles:
In 2009, to further promote safe interactions on our roads between bicycles and motor vehicles, the Governor signed several new laws. These expand the rights of bicyclists and make it easier to cite them for their own traffic violations. They also place new legal responsibilities on motorists. * The changes should help ensure that bicyclists have a safer riding environment. The changes enforce stricter standards on motorists to be alert and careful in the presence of bicycles. For a brief description of these changes, see page 78 and 106.

Attention Motorists:
Bicyclists have a legal right to use all public roads in this state except limited access or express state highways where signs specifically prohibiting bicycles have been posted. Like motorists, they are also required to know and obey traffic laws and regulations. Both bicyclists and motorists need to understand the laws. As a motorist, you need to understand and appreciate that bicyclists are far more vulnerable to injury and death when forced off the road and when in collision with a motor vehicle. Drivers need to know and respect bicyclists’ rights and safely share the road with them. You also need to know your own legal responsibilities when driving in the presence of bicycles.

Bicycles and Mopeds

Bicyclists and moped riders have the same right to use public roadways as all other drivers (the only exceptions are limited-access or express state highways with posted signs saying bicycles and mopeds are not allowed). They must obey the same traffic control and right-of-way laws. These riders can be hard to see in traffic and are not well protected against being hit by vehicles.

When passing a bicycle or moped:

- Lower your speed. The wind caused by your vehicle can throw a rider off balance.
- Leave a lot of room between your vehicle and riders.
- If you don’t have enough room to pass safely, wait for oncoming traffic to pass or for the lane to get wider.

Dim your headlights at night if a bicyclist is coming toward you. Be aware that a bicyclist or moped rider might need to swerve suddenly, just like any other driver. Always respect the rights of a bicyclist or moped rider to use the roadway, as you would respect the rights of another driver.

When parked on the side of a road, always check carefully for bicycles or mopeds before opening your vehicle door. See the "Danger of Open Doors to Bicyclists" section on page 109 for more information.
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Information about sharing the road with bikes included in Rules of the Road Chapter of Driver’s Manual

Laws for Bicyclists and Motorists in the Presence of Bicyclists  
(as amended by Chapter 525 of the Acts of 2008)

Bicyclists have the right to use all public ways in this state except limited access or express state highways where signs specifically prohibiting bicycles have been posted. When riding on public ways, bicyclists must obey the same basic traffic laws and regulations that apply to motor vehicle operators. The rules for bicycles (including amendments) are listed here.

As a bicyclist:  
(from Chap. 85, Section 11B)

• You can use the full lane anywhere, anytime, and on any street (except limited access or express state highways where signs specifically prohibiting bicycles have been posted), even if there is a bike lane.
• You must bike in the same direction as traffic unless otherwise indicated by signs or markings.
• You must stop at red lights and stop signs.
• You can keep to the right when passing a motor vehicle moving in the travel lane and you can move to the front of an intersection at stop lights.
• You must signal your intent by either hand to stop or turn. However, the signal does not have to be continuous or be made at all if both hands are needed for the bicycle’s safe operation.
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Information that the RMV provides in the Driver’s Manual seeks to educate both motorists and cyclists on how to share the road safely.

As a motorist in the presence of bicycles:

- **Do Not Cut-Off After Passing**: When passing a bicycle traveling in the same direction that is on your right, you must not return to the right until you have safely passed the overtaken bicycle. (Chap. 89, Sec. 2)
- **Do Not Make an Abrupt Turn After Passing**: When passing a bicycle near an intersection or driveway where you want to turn right, you cannot turn unless you are at a safe distance from the bicyclist and you can make the turn at a reasonable and proper speed. (Chap. 90, Sec 14)
- **Do Not Squeeze Bicycles in a Narrow Lane**: If a lane is too narrow to pass a bicycle at a safe distance, be PATIENT until you can safely use an adjacent lane or WAIT until it is safe to pass in the lane you share. (Chap. 89, Sec. 2) You should stay at least three feet away when passing.
- **Do Not Fail to Yield When Turning Left**: When turning left at an intersection or into an alley, private road, or driveway, you must yield the right of way to a vehicle approaching from the opposite direction, including a bicycle, if it is in the intersection or close enough to be an immediate hazard. (Chap. 90, Sec 14)
- **Watch for Bicycles on Your Right**: Bicycles can legally ride to the right of motor vehicle traffic. The law says it is not a defense for a motorist causing a crash with a bicycle that the bicycle was to the right of other traffic. (Chap. 85, Sec 118)
- **Do Not Open a Door Without First Looking**: Drivers and passengers can be fined up to $100 for opening a vehicle door into an oncoming bicycle. (Chap. 90, Sec 14) Before opening your door, you should always check behind you to make sure that no bicyclists are approaching.

- Be aware that bicyclists can ride two bicycles side-by-side. However, on a road with more than one lane in the direction of travel, they must stay in one lane. (Chap. 86, Sec 118)
- Be aware that bicyclists Do Not Always Have to Signal Turns! Bicyclists must signal their intent by either hand to stop or turn. However, the signal does not have to be continuous or be made at all if both hands are needed for the bicycle’s safe operation. (Chap. 85, Sec. 118)

See Appendix E for color images of these signs.

About 75% of bicycle-related deaths and disabling injuries could have been prevented if riders wore a proper bicycle helmet.
Adding New Information, Increasing Safety

In 2017, the RMV added information to the Driver’s Manual about the dangers open doors present to bicyclists.

The Danger of Open Doors to Bicyclists

Open vehicle doors pose a very serious threat to bicyclists. When opening a vehicle door, drivers and passengers are suggested to do the following:

1. Check your rear-view mirror.
2. Check your side-view mirror.
3. Open the door with your far hand (the hand farther from the door).

This is called the “Dutch Reach” method because it originated in the Netherlands. It forces your body to turn, which will better allow you to see approaching bicyclists. It also prevents the vehicle door from being opened too fast. This not only protects bicyclists, but can also prevent your door from being damaged or torn off by an approaching motor vehicle.

Bicyclists should ride at least three feet from parked cars to avoid doors, both on streets with and without bike lanes. This will keep bicyclists outside of the “door zone” and protect them from getting hit by opening vehicle doors.
“Dutch Reach”
https://www.dutchreach.org/

MASSACHUSETTS' DRIVER'S MANUAL GOES DUTCH
MassDOT Communications Team worked with the RMV on a media effort to announce the inclusion of the Dutch Reach information in the Driver’s Manual and to educate other members of the public about this safety feature.