

Riding in Groups and Other Cycling Tips

DISCLAIMER: THE INFORMATION BELOW IS USEFUL AS A SUGGESTION, BUT EVERY PERSON IS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR OWN SAFETY AND MUST USE THEIR OWN JUDGMENT.

Safety = predictability + communication

PREPARATION

- **What to Wear:** Bright colors, layers in all but hot weather, fabrics that wick (no cotton), fitted clothing that doesn't flap or get caught in the wheels or chain. No jeans. Glasses for eye protection. Sunscreen. And, of course, always wear a helmet.
- **Bike Preparation:** Pump your tires the night before each ride. In the morning, check that the tire is still firm. If the tire is soft, you have a slow leak and you can change the tube before the ride – rather than at mile 15 of the ride. Periodically, either clean and lube your chain yourself or bring it to the shop. Check other working parts, such as the brakes and brake pads. Inspect your tires for cuts or shards.
- **Tools and Equipment for Rides:** Always bring a spare tube of the correct size, and tire levers and a pump or cartridge. Two filled water bottles or hydration backpack. Pocket food, such as bars, trail mix, or other food your body digests easily (a ride is a poor time to try new foods).
- **What to Eat:** Always eat a moderate breakfast at least two to three hours before the ride starts. A nice balance for breakfast would likely include some protein, carbs and fats. For a short ride, no breakfast and pocket food alone might get you by. On a longer ride, breakfast and pocket food is needed; again, easily digested food is always best. On the ride, eat before you're hungry, and drink before you're thirsty.
- **What to Bring:** Identification, health information (conditions and medications), insurance card, emergency contact information, cell phone and some money. Carry these things on your body.

GENERAL

- Bicyclists are required by law to follow the same rules as cars.
- Cars move faster than most riders anticipate. Cars are traveling at 2, 3 or 4 times the speed of riders.
- Be courteous to all riders and drivers. You are an ambassador for cycling.
- Be aware at all times. Riding is not the time to daydream.
- You go where you look – never look directly at holes or other hazards, but keep them in your peripheral vision.
- Anticipate – don't wait until the last moment to move – don't ride up to a hazard and then jerk around it; go around it in a smooth sweep and direct riders behind you around it.
- Scan the road ahead -- anticipate
- Don't fixate on one point – scan the road near and far – continuously for oncoming traffic and road conditions
- Don't focus on the rider or wheel ahead of you, look past the rider
- On curves, look through trees/across land to anticipate oncoming traffic
- On downhills, don't focus on road directly in front of you, scan near and far, look far down the road (3 telephone poles or more away)
- Turning to look back or signal – move right hand next to stem on handlebar, remove left hand if necessary and then turn to look back or signal – reverse for pointing at hazards with right hand. This helps keep the bike going straight
- Braking: slide your butt (weight) back on saddle and feather the brakes, (that is, repeatedly tap the front brake then the back brake). Front brake - if you brake too hard or too long, you could go over the handlebars. Back brake – if you brake too hard or too long, you could skid and the back wheel could slide out from under you. If you have to stop suddenly and need to use both brakes simultaneously, get your weight as far back as possible - butt off the seat and over the back wheel
- Down shift to easier gear when stopping or slowing – this makes it easier to start again
- Starting from a stop – already in easier gear from above note, bring clipped-in foot up just forward of

top position, push forward and down to start moving – this gives you motion and time to clip-in the other foot without scraping along to get going.

- Do not yo-yo – that is, slow down, speed up, slow down, speed up. Keep a consistent speed. See [Pedaling](#) note below.
- Do not yo-yo. If you find that on every slight uphill you pass people, but they pass you back on the next flat – or the other way around – just stay in line. The constant passing, then slowing, forces the people to pass you again. Yo-yo'ing really bothers other riders.
- When regrouping, stay in single file on the side of the road. Do not bunch up. Make sure you and your entire bike are out of the lane of travel. Do not lean into the lane of travel.
- Ask. If not sure about something or have a question on a ride, never hesitate to ask the other riders that are riding safely; they will be eager to answer questions and to offer advice to help you ride well with the group.

COMMUNICATE

- Turns, hazards, glass, car up or back, pedestrian up, slowing, stopping, passing, etc...Communicate verbally or with gestures
- Do not rely on others to communicate for you. Please do not assume that the rider in front or in back of you has heard/seen someone else call something out. Call it out yourself.
- Pass all communications up or down the line of riders
- Project your voice – use your stage voice – do not talk quietly. Normal speaking voice does not carry. Also, wind caused by motion affects the ability to hear.
- Never slow down or stop unexpectedly – communicate “slowing” or “stopping” – if you slow down or stop unexpectedly, you may cause a pile up behind you. Always assume that there is someone right behind you.
- Getting in line or coming up right behind another rider – “I’m right behind you” or “on your wheel” – let riders know that you are there
- “Standing” – standing tends to slow you down so warn riders behind you
- “CAR BACK” means car approaching from the rear to pass

HOLD YOUR LINE

- Be predictable
- Ride in a straight, steady line – don’t be a squirrel weaving all over the road
 - *[Hint: use your peripheral vision and the white line/curb on the side of the lane to keep a consistent straight line]*
- Ride directly behind the rider in front of you – not off to the left or right; not more than 6 inches out from the line created by the rider in front. If you are riding to the left of the rider in front, you will create a blind spot for that rider when that rider needs to look back.
- Keep a safe distance that you are comfortable with between you and the rider ahead of you. Note that on faster rides, riders tend to ride closer to each other. If you leave more than a bike length between you and the rider ahead, another rider will likely pass you and fill in the gap.
- Stay on one side of the white line – ride just to the left of the white line or on the shoulder if the shoulder is wide, clean and sustained – keep a steady, straight line. By doing this you are predictable to other riders and to cars. Weaving back and forth across the white line is unpredictable.
 - *[Again the Hint: use your peripheral vision and the white line/curb on the side of the lane to keep a consistent straight line]*
- Never overlap your front wheel with rear wheel of another rider. If you do and your wheels touch, you will go down
- At traffic lights and stop signs, stay single file. Never bunch up. It is not the time to pass anyone.

PEDALING

- Keep pedaling – continuous pedaling is predictable and communicates to the riders behind you that things are OK. Soft pedal, if necessary, but keep pedaling.
- Most of the time, do not coast or glide – it is unpredictable, energy inefficient and slows you down

causing riders behind you to need to brake – causes yo-yoing (crazy making for those behind you!). It takes more energy to coast and then re-start pedaling.

- Pedal – even on downhills (except for very steep downhills) – the momentum will carry you up the next hill – works great on rolling hills.
- Spin (higher cadence), don't push/mash a hard gear (can cause knee problems) – spinning also allows more control.
- Keep even pressure on both pedals through the full circle of the pedal stroke – forward, down, back, then up. Pedal in circles.
- *[Hint: On the forward stroke, imagine pushing a barrel or log; on the bottom stroke, imagine wiping mud off your shoe and then pulling your heel to your butt.]*
- Keep your upper body quiet, keep your weight on your butt and off your wrists, so that you pedal from the waist down only.

PASSING

- Pass only on the left – in an orderly fashion – do not create a swarm of riders
- Again, never cross the double yellow line to pass
- Look back before passing – don't just pull out. Look, communicate, then move.
- Communicate [verbally]
- Tell every rider that you pass that you are passing – even when you are part of a group passing another group, particularly if you are a straggler
- All members of a group passing another group must communicate to all members of the group being passed that they are passing
- Do not assume that a rider or group of riders being passed knows how many people are passing or that a rider(s) in the group being passed won't pull out
- Hold your line if you are being passed
- On climbs, stay to the right unless passing
- After you pass, move safely back into the line. Communicate [verbally or with gesture] to re-enter the line of riders. Riders already in line don't speed up, allow passing rider back into the line
- On downhills, stay to the right to let faster riders pass within the lane

PARADOX OF QUIET ROADS

- You don't expect cars to be there and cars don't expect bicyclists.
- Ride on the right. Cars slalom on winding roads, cross the line on curves, and ride down the middle of the road particularly on unlined roads – therefore always stay to the right.
- Do not cut corners ever, but especially on narrow, winding roads with blind corners.
- Ride in the right 2/3 of the right lane (lane, not road)
- Never ride on the left side of the road (the on-coming traffic side)

URNS

- Signal, even if you think no one is around to see you – cars come up fast
- Signal well in advance of the turn, not at the last moment – warn your fellow riders and car drivers so they can anticipate what you are going to do
- If you miss a turn, do not suddenly stop or move laterally, continue past the turn, communicate slowing/stopping, then turn around and go back.
- Left turns: Make a 90-degree turn onto the correct side of the road you're turning onto. Do not start the turn early, before the break in the double yellow line. Do not cut the corner or start the turn before you reach the side of the road you are turning onto. Avoid traveling on a diagonal as you cross the oncoming traffic lane. Avoid being in the on-coming traffic lane of the road you're turning onto at any time during the turn.
- Be aware that many cars making a right turn from the road that you're turning left onto come up quickly, make rolling stops and barely look to the right before turning; These drivers look left for on-coming traffic and then proceed to make the right turn. Cutting the corner on a left turn can put you in the car's turning path. Drivers do not expect you to be on the wrong side of the road.

- When making a left turn, it's OK to stop if there is on-coming traffic. [Communicate that you're stopping.] Don't cut the corner or travel on the diagonal trying to beat or cut-off oncoming traffic. It's better to split the group rather than ride unsafely.
- If you're making a left in a marked left-turn lane, keep to the right of that lane so that left-turning cars can pass you on the left. When you both turn left, you will both be in the correct position on the road. Don't put yourself in the position of having to cross the path of a turning car as you both make a turn

RIDING DOUBLE

- Only on quiet roads – possibly.
- Stay to the right 2/3 of the lane – this allow other riders to pass without having to cross the center line/middle of an unmarked road
- Do not ride in the middle of the road – see the [Paradox of Quiet Roads](#) note above
- Ride single file if cars or other riders come along

CLIMBING AND DESCENDING

Downhills

- On straight-aways, keep feet and knees level – not one up/one down. On curves, put outside leg down. If the inside leg is down, the pedal can potentially scrape the ground.
- Hands in drops in most cases, or otherwise on the hoods.
- Slide butt (weight) back on saddle.
- For added stability on particularly difficult downhills: grip saddle with thighs, grip top tube with knees.
- Keep a loose grip on the handlebars. Let the bike do its job.
- Leave more room between riders than on the flats in case a rider ahead slows or moves laterally
- Stay to the right to allow other riders to pass within the lane
- If passing, yell that you are passing. The wind tends to drown out voices.

Uphills

- Put hands on top of handlebar with a loose grip, either center or on the curves right behind the hoods.
- Slide butt (weight) back on saddle.
- Sit up to get air into lungs, don't hunch over.
- Breathe steadily, and focus fully on the exhale (the inhale comes automatically).
- When standing for uphill, shift up one or two gears to create even tension in your pedal stroke.
- Also, keep your weight back when standing, over your pedals – use your body weight to help you get up the hill. That also weights the back wheel, which contributes to stability.
- Again, keep right except for passing. Keep right to allow other riders to pass within the lane
- Keep a straight line, do not weave
- Leave more room between riders than on the flats in case a rider ahead stops suddenly
- Learn to go slowly uphill with control so you can stay behind a slower rider if necessary – it's a sign of a skilled rider

FINAL NOTE

Emulate other riders that are riding safely. Be aware that on group rides, you will see some riders who are riding unsafely, unpredictably and not communicating. They are not role models and their actions are not to be emulated. Strength does not necessarily mean skill.

Remember: ***Safety = predictability + communication***