Confident City Cycling

Tips for Safe Cycling in Bellingham and Whatcom County

Cycling is Fun and Functional

Bicycling is a great way to get around town. Learn to share the road confidently and safely with vehicles, pedestrians and other cyclists by reviewing the information in this brochure and by participating in everybodyBIKE educational activities.

Find out about Bike Buddies, Bicycle Skills Rodeos for kids, Community Bike Rides, Full Cycle Classes, traffic laws, and more at everybodyBIKE.com or call 671-BIKE.

Bike According to Traffic Laws

Bicycles are legally defined as vehicles. By obeying traffic laws, cyclists can avoid the most serious bicycle/car crashes. Just like motorists, cyclists who disobey traffic laws are subject to penalty fines. Be sure to observe these key traffic laws for road cycling:

- Ride in the same direction as motor traffic
- Stop at stop signs and traffic signals
- Stop for pedestrians in crosswalks and yield to people walking on trails
- Do not ride on sidewalks in Bellingham and Fairhaven business districts
- Do not use headphones or other electronic devices while cycling on roads or trails
Five Principles of Confident City Cycling

1. Ride Visibly
   - Ride on the Right, with Traffic: (see diagram A) Being visible means positioning yourself where motorists are looking. Motorists generally see what is in front of them, so position your bike in the right third of the lane, not hugging the curb. Do not pass traffic on the right.
   - Ride in the Middle of the Lane When Necessary: (see diagram B) When lanes are too narrow to share, ride in the middle of the lane to remind motorists to be cautious and to cross into the other lane if passing. When riding along a row of parked cars, ride in the middle of the lane to avoid hitting suddenly opened car doors.
   - Ride in the Left Lane for Turns: Make left turns from the left lane. Prepare to move into the left lane by first checking over your shoulder, yielding, signaling and merging across the traffic lane when safe.
   - Use Lights and Reflectors at Night: Use bright white front lights on both the bike and helmet at night to see and be seen. Add red rear lights to the required red reflector. Cyclists without lights are invisible to motorists. Bright clothing and reflective bands increase visibility of cyclists during the day.
   - Avoid Riding on Sidewalks: Motorists expect slow moving pedestrians to be on sidewalks. Cyclists’ higher speed endangers people walking on sidewalks and puts cyclists on a collision course with turning motorists. Sidewalk riding is prohibited in the downtown areas of Bellingham and Fairhaven.

2. Communicate Your Intent
   - Choose the Appropriate Lane Position: Use your position in the lane as a signal of your intended direction. Position yourself in the left part of the lane when preparing to turn left, or the center when going straight.
   - Signal before Turning: (see diagram C) Look back over your shoulder to check traffic and yield before signaling a turn. Use hand signals to indicate turns as shown in the diagram. Indicate slowing or caution by extending your left arm straight down, palm back.
   - Avoid Blind Spots: A driver’s view may be obstructed by other vehicles, signs, mirrors, or roof supports. Be visible and make eye contact before entering an intersection.

3. Handle Intersections Defensively
   - Turn Right: (see diagram D) Approach the intersection in the middle of the right turn lane.
   - Turn Left: (see diagram E) Approach the intersection in the lane that cars use to make left turns. Cyclists may also turn left by walking the bike as a pedestrian in the crosswalk as shown in diagram E, option 2.
   - Go Straight: (see diagram D) Avoid colliding with right turning cars by riding in the center of the right lane or in the center lane if the intersection has a Right-Turn-Only lane. Avoid colliding with on-coming cars that are turning left by riding visibly in the correct lane, making eye contact with the on-coming driver, and being prepared to slow or stop.
   - Activate Traffic Signals: Position your bike in the center of the lane, about two feet behind the stop line to trigger the traffic signal. Report malfunctioning signals to the Public Works Department.

4. Beware of Roadway Hazards
   - Cross Railroad Tracks Perpendicularly: Wheels can become stuck in the tracks, causing a fall. When approaching railroad tracks, move into a position to cross with your wheels at right angles to the tracks.
   - Avoid Slippery Surfaces: Wet leaves, steel plates, sand, and roadway markings can cause wheels to slip sideways, resulting in a crash. If you can’t avoid the slippery area, ride in a straight line without braking or turning.
   - Give Clearance to Angle Parked Cars: Drivers backing up have limited visibility. Allow five or six feet clearance behind parked cars on angle-parking streets.
   - Anticipate Driver Vision Problems: Morning and evening sun in spring and autumn can blind drivers, especially if car windows are dusty. Ride defensively and make eye contact before proceeding through intersections.
   - Avoid Potholes, Debris and Broken Glass: Riding over debris or pot-holes can damage tires and cause you to lose control of your bike. Report roadway maintenance needs to the County or City Public Works Department.
   - Avoid Car Doors: (see diagram F) Ride at least three feet from parked cars to avoid suddenly opened doors.

5. Prepare for Bicycling
   - Look for Bike Friendly Routes: Use a bike map to plan routes with lower traffic, wider shoulders, or trails. Choose routes where you feel safe and comfortable for your skill level.
   - Check the ABCs: Each time before riding, check the Air, Brakes, Chain, and Quick release levers to make sure your bike is safe to ride.
   - Prepare for wet weather: Allow longer stopping distances and use bright colored rain gear to increase your visibility during rainy weather.
   - Lock Securely: Lock your bicycle frame and wheels to a rack or permanent post using a U-shaped lock and a strong cable. Always lock your bike even for short stops.
   - Wear Protective Gear: Following traffic rules and riding defensively prevent most crashes, but wearing a properly fitted helmet, gloves, and eye protection will reduce injuries if you’re in a crash.
   - Practical Essentials: Install a rear rack and front and rear fenders to make your bike functional for transportation.
   - Take the Full Cycle Class: Learn more about gear shifting, maintenance, bike fit, and more in the everybodyBIKE Full Cycle class.

Share the road safely and confidently. 