

# 10 Smart Routes to Bicycle Safety

Information provided, in part, by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

- 1. PROTECT YOUR HEAD. WEAR A HELMET.** Never ride a bicycle without a helmet. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) and the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) recommend that bicyclists wear a helmet that complies with the CPSC standard. Bicycle helmets can reduce head injuries by up to 85 percent. Choose a helmet that fits snugly and sits flat on the head.
- 2. ASSURE BICYCLE READINESS. MAKE SURE YOUR BICYCLE IS ADJUSTED PROPERLY.** Before using your bicycle, check to make sure all parts are secure and working well. The handlebars should be firmly in place and turn the front wheel easily. Your wheels must be true and secure. Add a carrier to the back of your bicycle if you need to carry any large items.
- 3. ALWAYS CHECK BRAKES BEFORE RIDING.** Always control your speed by using your brakes. If your bicycle has hand brakes, apply the rear brake slightly before the front brake. Always keep your brakes adjusted. If you cannot stop quickly, adjust your brakes. Consult your Bicycle Owner's Manual or have a bicycle shop adjust your brakes. When your hand brake levers are fully applied, they should not touch the handlebars. Each brake pad should wear evenly and never be separated more than one eighth inch from the rim. Ride slowly in wet weather and apply your brakes earlier – it takes more distance to stop.
- 4. SEE AND BE SEEN.** Wear clothes that make you more visible. Wear neon, fluorescent, or other bright colors when riding a bicycle.
- 5. STAY ALERT. ALWAYS KEEP A LOOKOUT FOR OBSTACLES IN YOUR PATH.** Stay alert at all times. Watch out for potholes, cracks, expansion joints, railroad tracks, wet leaves, drainage grates, or anything that could make you fall. Before going around any object, scan ahead and behind you for a gap in traffic. Plan your move, signal your intentions, and then do what you planned. If you are unsure, or lack the skill to handle an especially rough area, pull off to the right side of the road and walk your bicycle around the rough area. Be especially careful in wet weather and when there could be ice or frost on your path. Cross all railroad tracks at a 90 degree angle and proceed slowly. Use special care on bridges
- 6. USE EXTRA CAUTION AND PROPER EQUIPMENT AT NIGHT.** Most bicycles are equipped for daylight use and need to be adapted for nighttime use. If you must ride at night, you should do the following:
  - Use a bright white headlight required by Alabama law, and a red taillight. On rural roads you need a headlight to light your way, but even under streetlights you need a headlight to alert drivers, pedestrians and other bicyclists of your approach.
  - Also use a bright rear reflector, pedal reflectors and /or reflective ankle bands, and side facing reflectors, as required by Alabama law. If a carrier is added make sure the rear reflector is still visible.
  - Add the brightest lights you can find to the front and rear of your bicycle.
  - Additional retro-reflective clothing or material - not just white or fluorescent- on your ankles, wrist back and helmet can help make your visible to motorists approaching from behind (but only the headlight reliably makes you visible from ahead).
  - Plan to bicycle primarily during daylight hours. Avoid narrow rural roads with heavy traffic at night.. Brightly lit streets are better.
  - Young children should generally not ride at night.
- 7. GO WITH THE FLOW. THE SAFE WAY IS THE RIGHT WAY.** Ride on the right side in a straight predictable path. Always go single file in the same direction as other vehicles. Riding against traffic puts you where motorists don't expect you. They may not see you, and may pull across your path, or turn into you. Young children, typically under the age of nine, are not able to identify and adjust to many dangerous traffic situations, and therefore should not be allowed to ride in the street unsupervised. Children who are permitted to ride in the street without supervision should have the necessary skill to safely follow the "rules of the road."
- 8. CHECK FOR TRAFFIC. ALWAYS BE AWARE OF THE TRAFFIC AROUND YOU.** Over 70 percent of car-bicycle crashes occur at driveways or other intersections. Before you enter any street or intersection, check for traffic. Always look left-right-left, and walk your bicycle into the street to begin your ride. If already in the street, always look behind you for a break in traffic, then signal, before going left or right. Watch for left or right-turning traffic.
- 9. LEARN RULES OF THE ROAD. OBEY TRAFFIC LAWS.** Bicycles are considered vehicles. Bicyclists must obey the same rules as motorists. Read your State drivers' handbook, and learn and follow all the traffic signs, laws, and rules for operating a vehicle on the road. Always signal your moves. Be courteous to pedestrians and other vehicle operators. Never wear headphones while riding, as they impair your ability to hear traffic. Become familiar with the accommodations that are available for bicyclists in your area. These include bicycle lanes and routes as well as off-road paths. Take advantage of these whenever possible, if they suit your needs and purposes.
- 10. WHEELS MUST BE SECURELY FASTENED.** If your bicycle has quick release wheels, it is your responsibility to make sure they are firmly closed at all times and to use the safety retainer if there is one. Check your wheels before every ride, after any fall, or after transporting your bicycle. Read your Owner's Manual for instructions and follow them. If you are even slightly confused about what "firmly closed" means, talk to your bicycle dealer before you ride your bicycle.