

How to Commute Safely by Bike

Your Responsibilities:

1. Most importantly, at all times, be visible and predictable. Do not make erratic movements.
2. Always ride in the direction of vehicle traffic.
3. Never pass a vehicle on the right. Not only is this illegal but it's dangerous as you will be in a blind spot. Use extra caution around large vehicles and trucks, as the blind spots will be larger.
4. Cyclists are required to stop at all red lights and stop signs.
5. Use lights when riding at night.
6. Yield to pedestrians in unsignalized crosswalks, and in signalized crosswalks when they have the walk signal.
7. Signal your intentions with the following signals:
 - a. Left turn: Left arm straight out
 - b. Right turn: Right arm straight out
 - c. Slowing or stopping: Drop your left arm straight down with your palm open (the open palm is a universally understood symbol)
 - d. Graphics of these signals available [here](#).
8. Bicyclists may ride on the sidewalk except for in business districts (Downtown), BUT must always yield to pedestrians. Slow down and use caution when approaching driveways as drivers may not be looking for you. Also, see #9.
9. In order to legally require drivers to yield to you in a crosswalk, you need to get off your bike and walk it.
10. If you get a moving violation while riding a bike, be aware that if you have a driver's license it will go on your *driving* record and your insurance may go up.
11. See also: [Texas Transportation Code](#) on the operation of bicycles (551.101-104).

Drivers' responsibilities to you:

1. In the City of Houston, the [Vulnerable Road Users \(Safe Passing\) Ordinance](#) requires that drivers of passenger vehicles leave 3 feet of clearance when passing a cyclist or other vulnerable road user. Drivers of commercial vehicles (dump trucks and other trucks) must leave 6 feet of clearance.
2. The same ordinance also states that a driver may not make a turn in front of you that would cut you off or require you to stop to avoid a crash.
3. By the same ordinance, a driver may not harass or throw any object at a vulnerable road user.

If any of your rights are violated, try to memorize the license plate number. You can also legally take a photo of the car and the license plate. If on or near campus, please report the incident immediately to RUPD.

Helpful tips:

Following the law is not enough to keep you safe. For example, the law tells you to ride as far to the right as is practicable. But if you ride too far to the right, someone exiting a parked car could open their

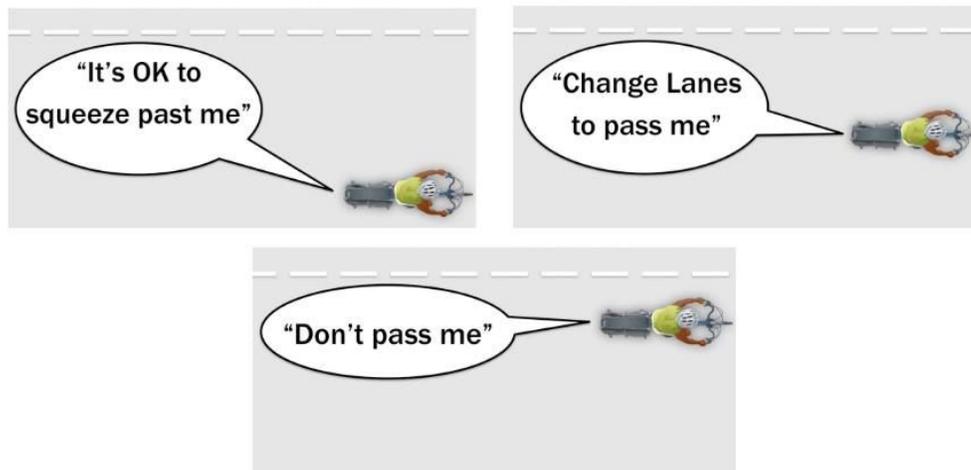
door right in front of you, and you'll be less visible to motorists pulling out of driveways and parking lots. Also, motorists coming from behind may pass you too closely because they didn't have to change lanes to get around you. In each of these cases you would have been following the law, but you could still be injured or worse. Here are some additional tips on how to ride to avoid conflicts with drivers.

The most important tactics you have at your disposal to keep yourself safe are:

1. *Strategic lane positioning*

By riding confidently and controlling your space, you can often control the way motorists treat you on the road. Although it seems counterintuitive, riding as far right as possible is often more dangerous than riding in the middle of the lane. This is because 1) it may give passing motorists the impression that they can squeeze past you without going into oncoming traffic at all, and 2) you are less visible to drivers waiting at intersections/driveways to make turns across your path. Drivers are conditioned to look for large cars which appear in the middle of lane, not smaller cyclists at the very edge of the road. If you're at the very right edge of the road, their view of you may also be obscured by parked cars or trees. See below for the message you may be giving motorists based on where you are riding.

Lane Position is the Most Important and Most (Constantly) Used Form of Cyclist Communication



Because of this, the law allows cyclists to be anywhere they want inside of the lane, as long as one of the many following exceptions apply (See [Texas Transportation Code, 551.104](#) for more details):

- Whenever there is debris, a pothole, or any other obstacle at the right hand side of the road.
 - i. Avoid getting into a situation where you see debris at the last moment and swerve. Instead give yourself plenty of room to avoid debris.
- When you are preparing to make a left turn.

- i. You should get to the middle or the left half of the turning lane in advance of your turn. Prepare for your left turn well in advance by signaling with your left arm straight out and looking over your shoulder to find a gap in traffic. If you are merging into vehicle traffic, ensure a driver sees you (try to make eye contact) and is slowing down to yield to you before you cross their path in the front.
- When you are approaching an intersection, or the intersection of a driveway with the road you are on.
 - i. Here, you should be in the middle of the lane to be visible to others at the intersection and to avoid conflict with any drivers behind you.
 - ii. Never be to the right of a vehicle when waiting at a stop. Always be in the queue of traffic. If you approach a stop sign at the far right of the road, a driver will often drive up on your left hand side and stop there. This is a dangerous situation because you are less visible and now it's unclear who gets to go first. Even worse, sometimes drivers will do this and then try to turn right in front of you. To avoid this, be in the middle of the lane and force a driver to wait their turn.
- When there are parked cars along the street.
 - i. In this case, always keep at least 3 feet of space between you and the parked cars. This is called the "door zone" and is to prevent drivers from opening their doors in your path.
- When the lane is less than 14 feet in width, or too narrow for a motor vehicle and a bicycle to ride side by side without the motor vehicle crossing the double yellow line, you may ride anywhere in the lane that you want.
 - i. As described above, this can prevent drivers from passing you too closely.
 - ii. The vast majority of marked lanes are in fact less than 14 feet in width.

2. Signaling

Again, being visible and predictable is the most important component to safe riding and signaling is a key part of that. See above for proper signals you should use while riding your bike. You will find that signaling causes drivers to give you more respect on the road. It makes everyone's jobs easier because they can predict where you are going to go and when. You should get in the habit of using these at all times, even when you do not believe anyone is around you.

3. Eye contact

Eye contact is humanizing. You will find that using it causes drivers to give you more respect on the road. Always make eye contact with drivers who may turn across your path to ensure that they see you. You can even use eye contact if you sense that a driver is approaching you quickly or aggressively from behind: a quick glance over your shoulder can communicate to them that you are a human, and remind them to slow down.

4. *Being aware of the most common types of crashes and minimizing your risk of them*

The most common collisions with vehicles include the right hook, right cross, left cross, and rear end. Even though they are usually not the cyclist's fault, it is important to know how to minimize your risk of them. For the sake of space we will not explain all them here; please see [this website](#) for more details.

Additional hazards frequently encountered in Houston include:

- Cracks in the road parallel to your direction of travel. Avoid getting your tire caught in the crack - it will make you immediately fall. The skinnier your tires, the more important this is. If you must ride across a crack, cross it as close to perpendicular as possible.
- Wet roads. When the roads are wet your ability to brake will be significantly inhibited. Any metal (i.e. pothole covers) and even paint will be slippery, so avoid riding over those. Always use lights when it's raining.
- Flooding. Don't ride your bike through flood waters. Not only will this damage the components, but in flood waters, manhole covers can come out of the ground and float away leaving the manhole exposed! You could accidentally ride into one.