

- GUEST OPINION

## **Guest Opinion: Why can't everybody play nicely?**

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Bicyclists and motorists sometimes don't seem to get along. It's no wonder — sometimes cyclists ride carelessly in traffic and sometimes cars seem to practically run cyclists off the road. But whether we're driving or biking, we can get along better, and much more safely, if we all learn and follow the rules of the road.

Did you know that in Oregon, bikes are considered vehicles? Bicyclists and motorists have essentially the same rights and responsibilities. Unfortunately, though, cyclists and motorists all too often either ignore or don't understand the laws. As examples, cyclists sometimes slow but don't stop at stop signs and motorists sometimes exceed the speed limit. It's understandable — it takes a lot of energy for a cyclist to regain momentum after stopping. And, do a few miles over the speed limit really hurt anyone? But let's agree on Rule No. 1 — always obey traffic laws.

Since bicycles are considered vehicles, they must travel on the right side of the road. Though a few cyclists might feel safer going against traffic, like pedestrians, it's dangerous because the motorist may not see the fast-approaching bike in time. Rule No. 2 — always ride with traffic (on the right).

Because bicycles are slower vehicles they are required to ride toward the right side of the lane. Think of a bicyclist as a slow-moving farm vehicle — both have every right to be on the road, toward the right side of the lane. Sometimes bicycles have their own bike lane, designated by an extra wide white stripe and bicycle symbol painted on the pavement. But please realize that narrow shoulders are not bike lanes! Where bike lanes don't exist, motorists need to share the road. We'll summarize all of this as Rule No. 3 — people riding bicycles should ride toward the right side of the lane.

When people riding bikes are traveling outside of cities, motorists are obligated, when passing, to give them the room that would be necessary to avoid running over the top of them if the cyclists were to fall into the lane of traffic. That is the requirement of Oregon law (ORS 811.065). If you were on a bike, wouldn't you want that much distance between yourself and fast-moving motor vehicles that weigh tons? It is frightening — and dangerous — when people driving motor vehicles pass too closely. Sometimes motorists give more room to dead skunks than to cyclists — living, breathing people who have families and could be neighbors, friends, or belong to the same church or service club. So Rule No. 4 — pass cyclists as though they might crash and tip over in front of you.

But how can you legally pass a slow bicycle (or a slow farm vehicle) when there are yellow “no passing” markings? Won't all the cars just back up behind the cyclist? There

is a special rule that allows motorists to cross over the yellow line (even a double yellow line) to pass a person riding a bicycle. How many motorists know that? ORS 811.420(3)(b) simply acknowledges that it is permissible, when there is an obstruction or other such condition, to drive to the left of the center of the roadway (but of course only when it's safe to do so). Rule No. 5 — when you come upon a cyclist, pass in the adjacent lane with caution when the traffic conditions permit.

Sometimes you'll see cyclists riding side-by-side. For many, cycling is a social sport, and riding next to your companion allows for conversation. And it's actually legal to ride two abreast in Oregon (ORS 814.430 (1)(e)). However, where traffic doesn't have enough room to safely pass the bicycles, the cyclists need to ride single file. This is not only required by Oregon law, it is just common courtesy to the motorists. So Rule No. 6 — be a safe and courteous cyclist and ride side-by-side only when motorists have enough room to pass safely.

There are more rules of the road, but if everyone follows these six rules, we can all get along better and enjoy safer driving and cycling. To learn more about safe cycling go online to [siskiyouvelo.org](http://siskiyouvelo.org) and click the tab “advocacy/education.”

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