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Back Refresh Options Search

**SHARING THE ROAD: SHOULD BIKES GIVE WAY TO CARS OR VICE VERSA?**

<a href="#">Introduction to the first monthly debate question</a>	Ethan Gelber	01/13/00
<a href="#">west coast situation...</a>	billy	01/17/00
<a href="#">Share the road: Common sense works best</a>	Charles	01/18/00
<a href="#">Give way to motorists.etc.....</a>	Al Hutchings	01/19/00
↳ <a href="#">Frustrating but rewarding</a>	Ethan Gelber	01/21/00
↳ <a href="#">sharing the rhoades</a>	dwayne rhoades	04/08/00
<a href="#">SHARING THE ROAD: SHOULD BIKES GIVE WAY TO CARS OR VICE VERSA?</a>	Dave Snyder	02/07/00
<a href="#">right of way</a>	ooze	02/13/00
<a href="#">right of way</a>	Nate	03/17/00
<a href="#">sharing the rhoades</a>	dwayne rhoades	04/08/00
<a href="#">Caution and Common Sense</a>	Jerry Dirk	06/27/00
<a href="#">In the Louisville KY metro area, drivers for the most part a...</a>	Daddy-o	07/13/00
<a href="#">Road sharing in the UK</a>	AJC	08/02/00
↳ <a href="#">Volvo Drivers</a>	Michael R.	08/05/00
<a href="#">Crazy Caddies</a>	Bill	08/18/00

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Top Previous Next Print Reply

**Date:** January 13, 2000 04:40 PM

**Author:** Ethan Gelber ([ethang@gorp.com](mailto:ethang@gorp.com))

**Subject:** Introduction to the first monthly debate question

I live in New York City. Cycling road safety and traffic priorities are more than just a passing concern here. My daily battles with taxis and sense-numbed motorists do for me what caffeine does for my non-wheeling colleagues. I have also been scared adrenaline stiff by near-death encounters on quiet country roads. The joys of power shifting through an s-curve seem to blur the vision of would-be Formula 1 enthusiasts. Fortunately, despite too many close calls, I am still here to type two-handed. I tip my hat to luck, my own exhausting riding vigilance, and a realistic approach to right-of-way politics. I credit absolutely nothing to drivers, most of whom sped away from such dangerous path-crossings, middle finger in the air. The rules of the road may make promises to those in motion under their own power, but reality is something very, very different.

So what can we do about it? Overdress with reflective material, clip a flashing light to every surface, and then claim a full lane to make sure people see us? Force them to slow down and move around us? The share-the-road philosophy rightly suggests that this peeves motorists more than we already apparently do. But is hugging a soft shoulder, dodging potholes and making way for unnecessarily wide SUVs a reasonable alternative? I don't think so.

What are your thoughts? What do you do? What have your communities done to protect cyclists, to educate all road users? What are the laws? What should be policy but isn't? What are the best ways to behave? What are the worst?

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---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** January 17, 2000 07:46 PM

**Author:** billy ([wild8bill](#))

**Subject:** west coast situation...

I live in the Bay Area, and there is currently a dispute between bikers and motorists. Actually, there is a dispute in how the law is to be interpreted. The law states that if there is not enough room to share the lane, that bikes can use the entire lane. Sequin adorned roadies like to ride side by side, and take up the whole lane for some reason, and claim legality based on the law. Drivers coming around a corner and finding bikes in the middle of the lane going about 10 mph believe that the bikes are impeding traffic (another law that applies to both bikes and cars). So far, officials have not claimed a legal ruling for this situation. Legal or not, the solution for those of us on bikes is to stay out of the way of cars. I would not like to make a point by being struck from behind by a car going 40mph. I know which roads have little or no traffic, and that's where I ride. I also don't run stop lights or ride on sidewalks; both of which piss me off when I see other bikers do it. A bike is a vehicle to which the rules of the road apply, unless otherwise posted. If a car or motorcycle were to run stop lights and drive on the sidewalk when it was convenient, it would seem odd, wouldn't it?

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=30558](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=30558))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** January 18, 2000 06:14 PM

**Author:** Charles ([chasdsjr@aol.com](mailto:chasdsjr@aol.com))

**Subject:** Share the road: Common sense works best

What drivers do not realize is that, as frustrating as it must be to have a biker slide in and out of their peripheral vision while stopping and starting along a busy street during rush hour, it would be far more disruptive to be stuck behind a biker that has inserted himself in the line of traffic. Some drivers suggest that bikers should take the whole lane for his (or her) right of way. These drivers do not like for bikers like myself to get ahead of them at a light. By pulling far over to the right to block the side of the lane or other less direct gestures, they indicate that we should take our places in line, behind them. I want to remind them that they might not like it if we did get behind a car at an intersection and that car was in front of them.

Share the road means let the biker by when there is room. Common sense for the biker: If there is not room, stop. Then signal left to enter traffic for the distance it takes to go around the obstacle and get

back over to the right giving enough room for the car to pass you again. The reason that this is difficult, besides the psychological offence taken by the Me-First drivers, is that we are practically invisible. We must assume that they are distracted, tired, over-stimulated and generally out of it. To be safe, we must overcompensate with extra vigilance, exaggerated signaling, reflective everything and above all, courtesy. Know their blind spots, avoid startling drivers, act in obedience with traffic lights.

What needs defining is proper biker behavior at residential stop signs. Slowing and looking, where a clear line of sight is possible, and proceeding when all is clear is as adequate and sensible for a biker as coming to a full stop at each and every stop sign is for the driver of a car. What do you think about that?

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---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** January 19, 2000 10:51 PM

**Author:** Al Hutchings ([ahutch70@hotmail.com](mailto:ahutch70@hotmail.com))

**Subject:** Give way to motorists,etc.....

I find where I live that most drivers are considerate. Ah, the benefits of living in a smaller urban area! I have, however had too many close calls to ride on busy streets on my commutes to work. I enjoy the more peaceful residential streets/bikepaths which I am lucky enough to have in my city. Educating motorists? Good Luck. I think the only way to go to teach these yahoos a lesson, you know, the beer-bottle out the window at you types, is to depend on the police in our communities to deal with them. It has worked well for me in our city. A visit from the local constabulary may make our obnoxious driver types think twice about harassing us. Ok, down off of my soap-box! I think that the worst thing we can do is to physically/vocally confront the unruly driver, in the interest of self-preservation. Let the law handle it, if at all possible, is my motto.....

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---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** January 21, 2000 10:37 PM

**Author:** Ethan Gelber ([ethang@www.gorp.com](mailto:ethang@www.gorp.com))

**Subject:** Frustrating but rewarding

All I really have to say is that "I hear you". Having been a stalwart bike commuter in NYC for many many many years - not to mention having more experience than I care to describe biking in such teeming and non bike friendly metropolises as Cairo and Beirut - I would have to agree with the previous submitter as to the futility of attempting to "educate" drivers. But then again, I think that "educate" is not the correct word. When ever I think of biking in the United States I can not help but think of Europe (where I have logged a number of miles/kilometers) - the awareness of bikers in Europe (especially such bike friendly locals as Italy and France) is not due to the "education" of the drivers but to the familiarization of the drivers to the presence of bikers. It is not that the drivers in Europe have "learned" their lesson, but rather, that they have become accustomed to the presence of bikers and thus are aware of the possibility that their might very well be two bikers riding abreast immediately after the corner they are entering. This, in a nutshell, is one of the many reasons that I insist on bike commuting in such a biking horror as NYC (especially in the winter months) - I REFUSE to give up my rights to the road way and by biking to and fro part of my intention is to accilmate drivers to the presence of bikes on the sacred roads

of this and every city.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=30767](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=30767))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** April 08, 2000 04:07 PM

**Author:** dwayne rhoades (<mailto:dwayne%20rhoades@mail.com>)

**Subject:** sharing the rhoades

passing on the left in parked traffic or at a red light should only be done when the occupants of the vehicles you want to get by are fully aware of your intention. i myself have witnessed cyclists get doored by trying to get to the front of traffic by passing between rows of stopped traffic and not realizing that a passenger may be using this opportunity to get out at there destination.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=34627](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=34627))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** February 07, 2000 03:24 PM

**Author:** Dave Snyder ([dsnyder@wcd.org](mailto:dsnyder@wcd.org))

**Subject:** SHARING THE ROAD: SHOULD BIKES GIVE WAY TO CARS OR VICE VERSA?

In Milwaukee it's a mixed bag - some drivers share the road, others are as mindlessly irritated as anyone anywhere. I follow a self-preservation model that means, most of the time, "let 'em by." I'm not here to hog the road or ruin anyone's day. But the main rule is it's MY DECISION when it's safe. If there's room, by all means go on by and get away from me - if there is a curb lane or decent shoulder. However, if I'm approaching a narrow bridge, severely potholed road-edge, row of parked cars, shoulder drop-off or other escape restriction, I'm going to occupy the whole lane - If they want to pass they have to change lanes or cross the center line. It angers some, and I just let 'em honk. If they're going to run me down they'd better do it with a purpose! I'm less worried about the rare deliberate psychopath than the common incompetent who'll try to "squeeze by" and brush me accidently. When approaching an intersection, I don't go all the way to the right, so drivers won't pass me and cut me off with a right turn - that's a seriously common foul.

A key thing - respect is a two-way street. No light-runing or wrong way on one-ways, and lots of lights and reflective gear, signals for turns, etc. On the rare ocassion I'm compelled to bail for the sidewalk, it's pedestrian speed or slower and totally yielding. When drivers see bikers disrespect the law, they lose respect for bikers.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=31328](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=31328))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** February 13, 2000 09:31 PM

**Author:** ooze ([smokalarasta@bikezone.com](mailto:smokalarasta@bikezone.com))

**Subject:** right of way

It so obvious -- pedestrians have the right of way, so why not cyclists too? It holds back all those out-of-control drivers. Haven't you noticed the way they drive? There's broken glass at almost every intersection!

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=31754](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=31754))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** March 17, 2000 03:48 PM

**Author:** Nate ([s03.nhawkins@wittenberg.edu](mailto:s03.nhawkins@wittenberg.edu))

**Subject:** right of way

I think that bicyclists should always have the right of way, especially when the roads are too narrow and the shoulder is insufficient to keep you off the road. But I think that the best course of action would be for dedicated bicycle lanes. I go to college in Springfield, Ohio, and have ridden many of the paved trails in the area. They are multiuse, accommodating pedestrians, equestrians, and bicyclists, but they are much safer than the common city street. I would like to see the expansion of such trail networks, especially in urban and suburban areas that are full of oversized road-hogging SUV's that have no qualms about making road pizza out of bicyclists.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=33594](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=33594))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** April 08, 2000 03:53 PM

**Author:** dwayne rhoades (<mailto:dwayne%20rhoades@mail.com>)

**Subject:** sharing the rhoades

I WAS a canadian bike courier for aproximately 12 years I Wood like to remind you all that we are a smaller slower vehicle and also virtually silent,you must take actions such as ridng in the centre of the curb lane using signals ringing your bell or horn . if a driver is not awhere of your presence there is a good possibilty of you being in a accident. also you will find that a responsible cyclist will get more respect from all other road users.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=34626](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=34626))

---

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** June 27, 2000 12:16 PM

**Author:** Jerry Dirk ([j.m.dirk@ieee.org](mailto:j.m.dirk@ieee.org))

**Subject:** Caution and Common Sense

3000 lb car vs 200 lb bike w/ rider, it's pretty obvious who is going to win that battle.

Fortunately, I live in a small (pop. 180,000) city that actually has implemented a bicycle commuting policy within the last few years. This includes dedicated bike lanes in certain areas of the cities as well as a number of road signs reminding drivers to "Share the Road". It's not perfect but it is a start. The largest problem I have is that on some main streets, the far right lane is considered a bus lane.

Personally I think bus drivers are the worst. They tend to tailgate about 5-6 feet behind a cyclist. And it's

pretty obvious that the stopping distance between a bus and a cyclist is a lot more than 6 feet. Conversely, when following a bus, since they make frequent stops, you end up tailing them for quite a distance, all the while inhaling diesel exhaust fumes and having to stop everytime the bus stops.

As for regular drivers, they seem to be pretty tolerant of cyclists. A skill that most bicycle commuters should master is being able to look behind themselves without swerving. This is safer for you and also tends to make drivers more relaxed if they see you not going to accidentally swerve into their path.

When encountering areas where it is necessary for me to become closer to moving vehicle than I feel comfortable, I yield to vehicles. This includes narrow roads, bridges, parked cars etc. Before I traverse such obstacles, I wait until the lane is clear or I find an alternate route. Also, when passing parked cars, I make a point of looking through the back window (when possible) to see if the vehicle is occupied to avoid eating a car door.

In the occasion where I feel I must ride on the sidewalk (despite the fact that it is illegal here, I would rather pay a \$30 ticket and annoy a few pedestrians than spend a week or longer in the hospital), I give pedestrians the same courtesy as I do hikers when riding on trails. Slow down to walking speed, do NOT speed past them as this typically scares and angers people. Also, I try to smile and either nod or say hello. As for narrow areas, such as bridges and walkways, dismount and walk, it takes longer but it will make pedestrians a lot more tolerant to cyclists.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=38345](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=38345))

---

● Top ● Previous ● Next ● Print ● Reply

**Date:** July 13, 2000 12:52 PM

**Author:** Daddy-o ([sblack@iglou.com](mailto:sblack@iglou.com))

In the Louisville KY metro area, drivers for the most part are considerate of bikers. There are still many roads in the area that do not have heavy traffic and are great rides. The one thing that does irk me as a cyclist and driver are the roadies that refuse to budge an inch, run lights and generally think they are lord of the road. What is it with these folks...jersey to tight? For all the kind and normal cyclist, let's keep setting a good example and the next generation will see that and follow it.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=39655](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=39655))

---

● Top ● Previous ● Next ● Print ● Reply

**Date:** August 02, 2000 05:10 AM

**Author:** AJC ([ajc@outdoorscotland.co.uk](mailto:ajc@outdoorscotland.co.uk))

**Subject:** Road sharing in the UK

In the UK we are on the verge of completing several thousand miles of dedicated cycle routes and cycle lanes as a millennium project. This is a great idea until you start to see the pitfalls.

More often than not, a cycle lane will simply disappear as you approach any intersection or roundabout - the most dangerous parts of cycling. I wonder if the planners found these features too difficult to deal with, or if they think a near death experience every now and again will brighten up our day.

The other major pitfall is that in cities, drivers see cycle lanes as a great place to park without obstructing traffic. Inspired.

Luckily in the UK we do not have the same likelihood of a car driver you dispute with carrying a gun. I will quite happily aim a kick at the taillight of anyone who cuts me up with the knowledge i'm unlikely to get shot.

One more point. Despite all the talk of road sharing and responsible drivers, I have one rule of defense. If you see a Volvo anywhere in your vicinity, get off your bike and off the road - they are a lost cause.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=41000](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=41000))

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** August 05, 2000 09:10 PM

**Author:** Michael R. ([bikedork@altavista.net](mailto:bikedork@altavista.net))

**Subject:** Volvo Drivers

Volvo drivers are usually pretty mellow over in the U.S. We have to look out for Saabs!

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=41245](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=41245))

[Top](#) [Previous](#) [Next](#) [Print](#) [Reply](#)

**Date:** August 18, 2000 02:42 PM

**Author:** Bill ([bscobey@onwis.com](mailto:bscobey@onwis.com))

**Subject:** Crazy Caddies

Forget the Volvos and Saabs, around Milwaukee it's the Cadillacs that rule the road.

([http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message\\_ID=41808](http://gorpforums.gorp.com/forums/Index.cfm?CFApp=52&Message_ID=41808))



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