

Slower traffic should keep right and allow faster traffic to pass when it is safe to do so whether that slower traffic is composed of cars or bicycles. Cyclists instinctively know this, and usually err in keeping right when they shouldn't. Motorists also know to pass on the left when it is safe.

The Politics of Bike Lanes

With the growing awareness of oil scarcity and other environmental concerns, cycling has become trendy, and many well-meaning but inexperienced cycling advocacy organizations have sprung up.

Bike lanes, which are conspicuous grants to the bicycling community, are used as proof of successful advocacy. To politicians, they are inexpensive ways to show friendship with environmentalists generally and cyclists in particular.

Thus the usual political phenomenon of doing things that look helpful without actually being helpful applies to bike lanes just as it applies to so many other "feel-good" measures. However, bike lanes put cyclists in dangerous situations. This problem must be addressed.

Better Solutions than Bike Lanes

There are much better ways to promote cycling and make it safe than by painting bike lanes.

Education: Both cyclists and motorists need to learn the principles of safe coexistence between them. A section on this should be added to driver's license manuals, and questions from that section should randomly appear in drivers' exams.

Bike-alert signs and markers should be placed to make motorists aware of routes with heavy bicycle traffic. These signs and markers should **not** imply in any way that bikes belong only on certain roads or only in certain positions.

Adequate bicycle parking should be provided, especially in neighborhood business districts where parking is congested. Eleven bicycles can be parked in as little space as is required for one automobile, allowing more customers to shop in the district. Bike Pittsburgh has done an excellent job of getting the city to erect user-friendly bike racks.

Providing showers and lockers for cycling commuters is also a fine idea. However, an excellent public-shower proposal for downtown Pittsburgh was quashed by Homeland Security for fear of a bomb being put in one of the lockers. We might be relegated to waiting for World Peace before we can advance beyond showers provided by employers, landlords and health clubs.

Off-road trails are excellent if they are not plagued with road crossings. It is much safer for cyclists to cross roads from other roads than to cross roads from trails. Fortunately, Western Pennsylvania's rail-trails and riverside trails mostly pass over or under bridges and have very few road crossings. The greatest problem on trails is for cyclists to avoid endangering pedestrians. Bells on bicycles help gently alert pedestrians of approaching cyclists.

Things You Can Do for Yourself

Self-education is the first step.

If you are a Pennsylvania resident, you can get a free copy of PennDOT's excellent *Bicycle Driver's Manual*. You can order it online at:

<http://qurl.com/2d2hr>

The manual is also online in HTML format at: <http://qurl.com/q413l>

If you do not have internet access, you can order the manual by calling: (717) 787-6746

Much of the content of that manual is taken from *Street Smarts*, by John Allen. If you are not a Pennsylvania resident, we recommend ordering the latest edition (or reading the online version) by going to:

<http://www.bikexpert.com/publicat/stsmordr.htm>

Organizations to Support

We believe the best cycling organizations are those that promote making cycling safer generally rather than segregating cyclists onto bike lanes or otherwise patronizing them as stepchildren within a car culture.

Bike Pittsburgh (bike-pgh.org) deserves support for excellent work they do in other areas, although we vigorously oppose their

cavalier attitude toward the dangers of bike lanes.

The Coalition for Appropriate Transportation (car-free.org) in Bethlehem, PA is savvy about the hazards of bike lanes. Bike Pittsburgh's advocates could learn from their example.

The Allegheny Trail Alliance (atatrail.org) does excellent work with cycling/pedestrian trails, and their literature has recognized the dangers of door-zone bike lanes.

(<http://www.atatrail.org/pdf/1TTManual.pdf> page 49 of 51)

Western Pennsylvania Wheelmen

(wpwbikeclub.org) is the oldest cycling organization in the region. Although they are not an advocacy organization, they have the greatest pool of cycling expertise from which to draw, and we hope advocates will rely more heavily on that expertise.

The Bicycle Access Council of Pennsylvania (BicycleAccess-PA.org) is our only statewide cycling advocacy organization.

The Ohio Bicycle Federation is one of the nation's outstanding cycling organizations, with extraordinary energy, expertise and organization.

Chainguard (probicycle.com) has been advocating full cyclist rights since 1973, and is an excellent "hub" for cycling safety expertise.

Saving Communities (savingcommunities.org, 412.687.5263) is not a cycling organization, but we are the only group that has taken on Pittsburgh's unsafe bike lanes, and we value your support. Our primary focus is on measures that respect an equal right to the commons.



Freedom, equality and respect for the commons

Saving Communities

Saving Communities warns:

Do Not Ride in Door-Zone Bike Lanes

All Bike Lanes pose safety problems, but door-zone bike lanes are the most dangerous of all. Downhill door-zone bike lanes, like the one on Liberty Avenue between 40th Street and Heron Avenue in Pittsburgh, are deadly.



Pittsburgh's new bike lanes are only 7' from the curb, including the lane stripe, even though many cars are over 6'6" wide and almost always park more than 6" from the curb. (Trucks can be up to 8'4" wide.)

The bike lanes are only 53" between the stripes, even though car doors open as wide as 44". Even cyclists riding along the left-hand edge of the bike lane have their handlebars within the door zone.

"Imagine a traffic control device you must disobey to save yourself from serious personal injury or death. Imagine that many "bicycle advocates" avidly promote this traffic control device. You don't have to imagine it. I'm talking about the door-zone bike lane."

—John Schubert, secretary, PennDOT's Pedestrian and Pedalcycle Advisory Committee

How deadly is Liberty Avenue's downhill door-zone bike lane?

Between 40th Street and Heron Avenue, Liberty Avenue is a 5% grade. Even with light pedal effort, a cyclist travelling down that grade will reach speeds of 32–35 miles per hour. As most cyclists do not have speedometers, it is safe to assume that many will exceed 30 miles per hour, which is still slower than the usual flow of motorized vehicular traffic.

At 30 miles per hour, a cyclist who is about to hit an abruptly opened door is going the same speed as if he had stepped off a 60' building and is about to hit the ground. Cyclists almost always hit doors head-first.

Even on level stretches, many cyclists travel 15–20 miles per hour, the speed one would hit the ground at after falling 24–36 feet.

Can I spot potential "doorings"?

With today's car headrests and tinted windows, most cyclists cannot effectively spot people inside cars at speeds in excess of 6–7 miles per hour and still have time to stop. Below that speed, most cyclists will have trouble keeping their balance. Thus the fastest speed one can safely go in a door zone is also the slowest speed one can safely go in a door zone.

Can I swerve when a door opens?

At 30 mph, you will have already gone two car length before you can even begin to react. Also, turning a bike is slower than turning a car due to balance issues. You must turn slightly to the right to throw your weight

to the left, and only after your weight has shifted can you actually swerve left. Even an experienced cyclist who can swerve quickly and automatically does not swerve instantly. If you do not swerve at all, you will hit the inside face of the door. You can hope that there is enough "give" in the door to save your life and reduce your injuries.

Even if you swerve successfully, you will have just swerved into the traffic lane without having had time to check for traffic. (If you were checking for traffic all along, you were not watching properly for potential doorings; it's impossible to do both.)

Worst of all, if your right handlebar hits the door while you are leaning to the left, you will be thrown to the ground in the middle of the traffic lane, where you have a serious chance of being run over. This is believed to be how veteran cyclist Dana Laird was thrown under the wheels of a transit bus in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Aren't bike lanes safer overall?

Not really. Riding in bike lanes reduces your visibility and maneuverability from almost every perspective. That is why PennDOT's "Bicycle Driver's Manual" warns cyclists *not* to ride to the right of traffic unless the road is exceptionally wide. (See Figure 1 from that manual at top right.)

Invisibility Issues

Motorcycle studies have shown that the closer a motorcyclist is to the edge of a road, the more likely he will go unnoticed by other motorists, even if motorists' views are unobstructed.

The same phenomenon occurs with cyclists. They are least noticed on sidewalks, only somewhat noticed in bike lanes and most noticed in traffic lanes. Moreover, the further

cyclists ride to the right, the more likely motorists' views of them will be obstructed. The cyclist can also see better from the center of the traffic lane than from most bike lanes. Finally, pedestrians are more likely to step into cyclists' paths without seeing them if the cyclists are close to the edge of the road or to parking spaces.

Right Turns from the Cyclist's Left

A cyclist directly behind a car can be seen in the driver's rear-view mirror, but a cyclist in a bike lane can be in that driver's "blind spot." If a driver makes a right-hand turn from the traffic lane, he could easily collide with that bike-lane cyclist. (Fig. 1, car b.)

Cross-Traffic

Drivers pulling out from driveways and cross streets are far more likely to see a cyclist in the traffic lane than in a bike lane. (Fig. 1., Car a.)

Drivers Cutting Across Traffic

Oncoming drivers making left turns often try to quickly slip in between two vehicles. The farther a bicycle is to the left, the more likely an oncoming driver will see it and avoid cutting into it.

Debris in Bike Lanes

Bike lanes are notorious for collecting worn asphalt bits, gravel and debris from the traffic lanes. The problem tends to be worse in distressed municipalities that neglect road-cleaning services to balance their budgets.

Loss of Maneuverability

When a cyclist has to maneuver suddenly, whether to avoid debris, a pothole, a pedestrian or some other obstacle, being positioned at the edge of the road means he can only maneuver in one direction. A cyclist closer to the center of

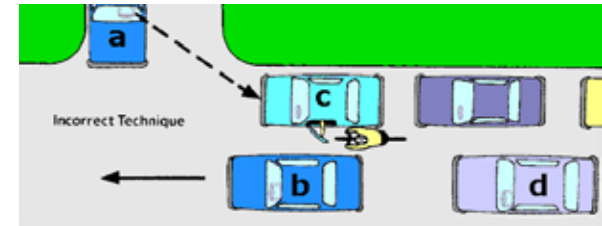


Fig. 1 "Incorrect Cycling Technique" the road can maneuver in either direction.

Left Turns from Bike Lanes

Cyclists in bike lanes sometimes find themselves needing to turn left without time to properly position themselves in the left lane. Sometimes they are unable to even find the street they want to turn onto because their view from right-side bike lanes is obstructed. As a result, they have a difficult time safely making left turns.

Motorist Harassment

Motorists who think that cyclists belong in bike lanes sometimes try to intimidate cyclists who are riding in "car" lanes for legitimate reasons.

Other Bike Lane Defects

Bike lanes are often poorly designed in other ways, such as abruptly ending with no warning to merge or ending at an intersection, forcing the cyclist to merge within the intersection.

Inexperienced Cyclists

Inexperienced cyclists should avoid dangerous roads until they become proficient on quieter roads, just as inexperienced motorists should. Giving them special lanes might make them *feel* safer, but it actually endangers them even more, especially when the lanes are alongside parked cars.

Applying Standard Traffic Principles to Cycling

In Pennsylvania, bicycles are vehicles, and cyclists are assigned the same rights and are subject to the same traffic rules as other vehicle operators, except where cycling is expressly prohibited or restricted. We believe that is as it should be. (over)



Scene of the Dana Laird fatality on a bike lane similar to Pittsburgh's Liberty Avenue bike lane, except that this one was not going down a steep hill.