Virginia laws and safety tips for motorists bicyclists pedestrians
Share VA Roads promotes safety procedures and traffic regulations for all users of Virginia's roads and paths. This guide is designed to help motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians use Virginia's transportation network safely.

The Virginia code defines bicycles, electric power-assisted bicycles (e-bikes), motorized skateboards or scooters, and mopeds as "vehicles" when operated on a highway, although they are not defined as motor vehicles. While the three modes of transportation are different, it's important to know that the Code of Virginia rules for motorists (Title 46.2) also apply to cyclists and pedestrians when they are sharing the state's roads and paths.

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This booklet is a great place to start learning the rules and most common safety practices for all travelers sharing Virginia’s roads, trails, and paths. Everyone should respect that people who drive, bike, and walk have mutual rights and responsibilities. Awareness of others makes sharing the roads safe and predictable.


For a summary of Virginia's pedestrian and bicycling laws, visit: virginiadot.org/programs/bikeped/laws_and_safety_tips.asp

Knowledge to Live By: A Quick Safety Overview

More information on these topics is found in the remainder of this booklet.

EVERYONE:
- Be aware of others using roads, sidewalks, or trails.
- Don’t use mobile devices or other distractions while driving, cycling, or walking.
- Don’t drive, ride, or walk under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

RIGHT OF WAY: In traffic laws, right of way refers to the priority to proceed ahead of others.
DRIVERS must respect the rights of pedestrians and cyclists and yield the right of way to them.

As a driver, you must always:

• Stop when yielding to pedestrians and bicyclists who are crossing the road in a crosswalk, especially when you are turning.
• Stop and do not pass if a car is stopped at a crosswalk or intersection.

• Come to a full stop for pedestrians using a cane or guide dog, as this indicates blindness or vision impairment. It is a Class 3 misdemeanor for failing to stop.
• When turning in front of a cyclist, ensure plenty of distance between you to avoid a collision.
• When approaching cyclists from behind, change lanes if possible before passing. If not possible to change lanes, drive by cyclists at a reasonable speed with a safe gap of at least three feet between your car and the bicycle ($250 fine, § 46.2-113).
• Understand that cyclists may legally take the travel lane to avoid road hazards and discourage unsafe passing.

Don’t:

• Honk, yell out to, or crowd people walking and biking.
• Drive aggressively or distracted.
• Use hand-held communication devices while driving.

It is illegal to hold a handheld personal communications device (e.g., a smart phone) while driving a moving motor vehicle on the highways in Virginia. Fines are based on the number of offenses.—Code of Virginia § 46.2-1078.1
BICYCLES are considered vehicles when ridden on streets, and cyclists must abide by the same laws as motorists:

Every person riding a bicycle on a highway shall be subject to the provisions of the Code of Virginia section on motor vehicles and shall have the rights and duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle unless a provision clearly indicates otherwise. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-800

When riding a bicycle, always:

• Obey all traffic signs, signals, lights, and markings.
• Wear a helmet — it reduces the chance of a head injury.
• Look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT when turning or crossing.
• Travel in the same direction as motorists in the right lane, designated bike lane, or shoulder if cycling significantly slower than traffic.
• Avoid road hazards where appropriate and discourage unsafe passing.
• Ride no more than two side-by-side.
• Use motor vehicle turn lanes when turning to avoid collisions with vehicles.
• Obey signs that restrict riding on interstate highways and limited access roads.
• Call out or ring a bell to alert others when approaching from behind or passing on a sidewalk or path.
• Carry children securely in special seats or trailers and make sure they wear helmets.
• Use white headlamps visible from 500 feet, rear reflectors visible from 600 feet, and a red light when cycling between sunset and sunrise.

Don’t:

• Carry passengers on bicycles built for one rider.
• Wear headphones or earbuds in both ears.

PEDESTRIANS have rights and responsibilities:

As a pedestrian, always:

• Watch for other pedestrians as well as cyclists and motorists.
• Be alert to surroundings and listen for motorists and cyclists.
• Use sidewalks, paths, or crosswalks wherever possible.
• Look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT when crossing on roads without a sidewalk.
• Walk on the edge or shoulder of the lane facing traffic.
• Obey Walk/Don’t Walk control signals and countdown timers.
• Use caution when crossing, giving time for vehicles to stop.

Don’t:

• Use mobile devices when crossing the street.
• Text and walk. You must be watching in all directions for vehicles and bikes in case you need to move out of the way quickly.
• Wear headphones or earbuds in both ears.
Right of Way

Pedestrians have the right-of-way on streets and sidewalks. Motorists and cyclists must yield to pedestrians.

The drivers of vehicles entering, crossing, or turning at intersections shall change their course, slow down, or stop if necessary, to permit pedestrians to cross such intersections safely and expeditiously...Pedestrians crossing highways at intersections shall at all times have the right-of-way over vehicles making turns into the highways being crossed by the pedestrians. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-924

Motorists must yield the right of way to pedestrians and cyclists and be cautious at intersections and driveways, where collisions often occur. Pedestrians do not have the right of way if they are facing a don’t walk signal or in absence of a signal at a red light. Pedestrians do not have the right of way to walk out in front of a car without giving enough time for the car to stop. By law, motorists must approach and pass cyclists at a reasonable speed, at least three feet away from cyclists.

Cyclists must yield the right of way to pedestrians. Cyclists may legally ride on sidewalks unless prohibited by local ordinance or traffic control device. When approaching pedestrians, cyclists must slow down, ring a bell or give an audible warning such as “passing on your left” and wait for the pedestrian to move over.

Even though cyclists have the right of way when encountering motorists, when riding on sidewalks, they should slow down to watch for vehicles at intersections and driveways. Motorists’ views are often obstructed by parked cars or other objects.

Generally, pedestrians have the right of way. However, they can help avoid collisions by paying attention to motor vehicle and bicycle traffic. Pedestrians should use eye contact and gestures to ensure they are seen by cyclists and motorists when crossing streets and driveways.

Motorists must stop and remain stopped until the pedestrian crosses the lane. Drivers approaching or adjacent must not overtake or pass the stopped vehicle. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-924

What to Do in the Event of a Crash

If you are involved in a crash, follow these steps:

- Check to see if anyone is injured, call 911 immediately, and file a police report.
- If you are trained, administer first aid.
- Remove the injured person(s) from harm’s way and assist until first responders arrive. NOTE: Severely injured persons should not be moved.
- Anyone who renders emergency care or obstetrical services is exempt from liability, as noted in Virginia’s Good Samaritan law.
- Do not walk, drive, or ride away without first receiving medical attention, as injuries may appear later.
- Individuals involved in the crash should provide the authorities:
  - Name, address, phone number, and email address
  - Vehicle registration number
  - Driver’s license number
  - Name of insurance company and policy number
Definitions

Crosswalk: Wherever sidewalks meet the street and where streets intersect, a crosswalk exists, whether painted on the road or not. Crosswalks could be marked mid-block.

Shared-use path: Facilities physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier. Shared-use paths may be used by bicyclists, pedestrians, skaters, users of wheelchair conveyances, and other non-motorized activities. Always yield to slower users.

Bicycle lane: That portion of a roadway designated by signs and/or pavement markings for the preferential use of bicycles, electric power-assisted bicycles, motorized skateboards or scooters, and mopeds.

Highway: The entire width between the boundary lines of every way or place open to the use of the public for purposes of vehicular travel in the Commonwealth, including streets and alleys.

Leading Pedestrian Interval: A Leading Pedestrian Interval (LPI) is a pedestrian traffic signal that gives people walking a 3–7 second head start when entering an intersection. LPIS enhance the visibility of pedestrians in the intersection and reinforce their right-of-way over turning vehicles, especially in locations with a history of issues.

Blind Spots

A blind spot is the area around a vehicle that cannot be seen by the driver while driving. Drivers of cars, trucks, and buses have blind spots. Motorists, cyclists, and pedestrians need to take efforts when possible to ensure their visibility. Watch carefully when vehicles may be turning or stopping.

- Document what happened in writing and with photos, including any injuries or damage, as soon as possible.
- Contact your insurance company.
- Save all receipts and repair estimates.
- The Washington Area Bicyclist Association has useful resources: waba.org/resources/what-to-do-after-a-crash
Motorists

On the Road
Cyclists can ride bikes on roads, and motorists must share the road with them, whether bike lanes are provided or not. **Cyclists may use the full right traffic lane for safety.**

**Driving Safely Around Bike Lanes**
Bike lanes separate bikes, e-bikes, motorized skateboards, and scooters from other traffic. Bike lanes may be marked by signs, as well as white lines or colored pavement, and symbols applied to the pavement. Parking is not allowed in bike lanes. Often, cyclists need to ride outside a bike lane when it is too narrow, or hazards are present.

Motorists are prohibited from driving into marked bike lanes, including when passing. Motorists are only allowed to cross into a bike lane when turning right. Before crossing a bike lane to turn, drivers must scan for cyclists to the right, rear, and forward, use their turn signal, scan again and then merge into the bike lane for the turn.
**Sharrows**

Shared Lane Markings (sharrows) help motorists stay aware that cyclists may be using the road. **Sharrows are an indicator to drivers that bicyclists may take the lane, and there is not enough room to share the lane.**

Sharrows help cyclists ride safely:

- next to parked cars to avoid crashing into car doors that are suddenly opened.
- in lanes that are too narrow for cars and bicycles to comfortably travel side by side.
- on steep downhill slopes, since they need more maneuvering space to react when traveling at a high speed.

**Motorists: Stop**

Motorists must come to a complete stop at red traffic signals and STOP signs. Before turning right on red, they must STOP, look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT, then proceed. The most dangerous situation for cyclists and pedestrians is at intersections where motorists fail to come to a stop.
Turning

Drive cautiously when turning and watch for others waiting at stop signs or lights. They may be preparing to move. Look out for those who may not see your vehicle as you are turning, and make eye contact around you.

Right Turns: Come to a complete stop before turning right on red. When making a right turn, slow down and check for cyclists and pedestrians. Check behind you to ensure you do not turn into a cyclist’s path as you cross the rightmost parts of the travel or bike lanes. Look ahead of you into the crosswalk and on the adjacent street corners to make sure people walking and cycling are not entering the crosswalk. Avoid a common collision by looking right before making a right turn on red or from a driveway.

Turning left: One of the most common types of collisions occurs when motorists turn left. Slow down and watch the crosswalk before you begin your turn. Pedestrians and cyclists may have the same “go” signal that you have and can cross in front of your vehicle as you turn.

Always be prepared to STOP suddenly or take other evasive action if a cyclist or pedestrian makes an unexpected move.

Intersections and Crosswalks

What is a crosswalk?

Crosswalks might not be marked or painted on the highway. Wherever sidewalks or trails meet the street and where streets intersect, a crosswalk exists, whether painted on the road or not. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-924.

Motorists and cyclists must yield and stop for pedestrians in crosswalks, both marked and unmarked.
Don't block crosswalks and intersections
Motorists should not pass the white stop bar and encroach on the crosswalk while waiting for the signal to change. Doing so prevents walkers and cyclists from safely using the crosswalk in front of the car.

Similarly, motorists should not enter an intersection until there is enough space to clear the intersection on the other side. Otherwise, they will end up blocking the crosswalk on the far side.

Be aware
Many collisions occur when people walking or on bikes cross the road, either mid-block or at intersections.

Drivers: look left-right-left-straight
In addition to looking for other vehicles, motorists should look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-Straight for cyclists and pedestrians, particularly at heavily used traffic or trail intersections.

Trail and road intersections
Motorists should consider trail intersections as they would other intersections even if crosswalks are not marked.
Motorists: Slow down
Speed kills. Speeding was the main factor in 42% of the 4,097 traffic deaths and 20% of the 317,497 injuries from 2016 and 2020. Speeding was also a factor in 25% of fatal crashes involving pedestrians and cyclists. Between 2016 and 2020, pedestrians represented 14% of all traffic deaths. Even vehicles traveling at relatively low speeds can cause serious injury and fatalities.

A person who operates a motor vehicle in a careless or distracted manner and is the proximate cause of serious physical injury to a vulnerable road user is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor leading to jail or a fine. —Code of Virginia § 46.2-816.1

Don’t Pose a Double Threat
Passing at crosswalks and intersections is illegal. Drivers often do not see people crossing the road in front of slowed or stopped vehicles.

When crossing more than one lane of traffic, watch for “double threats” where one vehicle stops and others pass around without stopping for bicyclists and pedestrians trying to cross.

Reduce this risk by waiting for better visibility across lanes of traffic.
Passing

SLOW DOWN TO GET AROUND: Passing emergency and stopped vehicles (mail, delivery, tow, construction, road repair, and trash trucks) requires extra care, as there are often drivers and workers on or near the road.

Waste collection workers are frequently at risk, as they are in our neighborhoods on a regular basis. The “Slow Down to Get Around” law requires drivers passing stopped collection vehicles to slow down to at least 10 miles per hour below the posted speed limit and provide at least a three-foot cushion between their vehicle and the collection vehicle. Violations are punishable by fines. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-861.1

Watch for approaching bicyclists and pedestrians
When there is no sidewalk or shoulder, motorists need to look for people who are walking or riding bikes along the edge of the road. Pedestrians are safest if they walk facing traffic. Cyclists should ride with traffic on the right side of a two-way road.

Pay extra care when encountering bicyclists and pedestrians. Photo speed enforcement may be located near school and construction zones. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-882

Safe passing with cyclists on the road
The law requires that motorists stay at least three feet away from cyclists as they pass them. Drivers may legally cross the yellow line in order to pass a cyclist safely, if the oncoming lane is clear. Drivers need to give three feet or change lanes when passing bicyclists, including crossing yellow lines when safe and necessary. Bicyclists may ride two abreast and take the lane. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-882.

Drivers must stay out of bike lanes. Use caution when turning, in case cyclists are in your blind spot. When turning, watch for cyclists and pedestrians crossing in front of your vehicle.
Transit and rideshare: While passing stopped vehicles, watch for people exiting and boarding. Slowed or stopped traffic could indicate people are crossing the street. Watch before passing to reduce the risk of hitting a pedestrian or cyclist crossing in front of a stopped vehicle.

Drivers MUST STOP for school buses
All oncoming and following traffic must stop for stopped buses with red flashing lights and a stop sign extended. The only time people driving do not need to stop is when the school bus is traveling in the opposite direction on a divided roadway with a median or barrier. (§ 46.2-859)

Check before opening car doors
Be mindful of your surroundings whenever you open the driver’s door on the side of passing traffic. It is your responsibility to ensure your car door will not obstruct the path of a passing cyclist.

If you or your passenger hit a cyclist with a car door, your vehicle is at fault. Virginia law levies a fine on drivers who open a vehicle door on the side of passing traffic without confirming that it was “reasonably safe to do so.” –Code of Virginia § 46.2-818.1

Dutch Reach
The Dutch Reach, a safe method of opening the driver’s side door, is used in Holland where there are many cyclists on the road. Here’s how:

• Seated behind the wheel, use your right hand to reach in front of you toward the door, pivot your body to the left to look back to see if any cyclists or traffic are approaching. Also check the side mirror.
• Then open the door, still with caution, with your right hand. This helps minimize the chance of “dooring” a cyclist (hitting them with a car door) or having your door hit by oncoming traffic.

Backing out
Before backing out of a parking space or driveway, drivers should look behind, left, and right to check for pedestrians, cyclists, and other cars before proceeding.

Commuting
Consider driving at non-peak travel times to avoid stress and traffic congestion.

Leave a safe distance between your vehicle and buses as they may stop frequently. Pass a stopped bus only with extreme care, as people exiting the bus may cross in front of it.

Look for pedestrians and cyclists when entering and exiting driveways and parking garages. Look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT.

Rainy/Snowy Conditions
Drivers should always use headlights in poor weather conditions. If you are unsure of your ability to drive safely, do not drive. Take extra care to look out for pedestrians, cyclists, and those taking transit in dim light or rainy weather.
Turning

Account for your car’s blind spots, especially when driving an SUV or truck, by checking side mirrors, the rear-view mirror and turning your head if safely possible.

Left Turn: **YIELD!** Look **LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT.**
Don’t cut or turn into the oncoming travel lane to beat traffic. Check all lanes to be sure there is no oncoming traffic hidden behind turning vehicles.

Right turn... **STOP!** Look **LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT.** Check for any pedestrians or cyclists who may be approaching from behind on the right.

Drivers should watch for pedestrians, especially:
- At stop signs and when pulling out of or into driveways and parking spots.
- When preparing to turn.
- When turning left with oncoming traffic.

Drivers should always be prepared to stop suddenly or take other action to avoid a collision with another vehicle, a cyclist or pedestrian.

**Crash facts:** According to the Virginia DMV Highway Safety Office, in 2020, even with the fewer cars traveling during the pandemic, there were 1,242 motor vehicle crashes involving pedestrians:
- Injuring 1,186 people,
- Killing 114 people,
- Speed was a factor in 48% of fatal crashes involving pedestrians.
Before Cycling

Bike fitting
It’s important to have a bike that meets your needs. Local bike shops can help you select the right bike.

Size: Having a bike that fits you is important for safety and comfort. You should be able to reach the pedals and handlebars easily. This can give you greater control of your bike.

Style: Road bikes have narrow tires and dropped handlebars and are designed for faster riding. Mountain bikes have wide tires and are designed for off-road or winter use. A hybrid or city bike combines features for comfort and efficiency.

Electric bikes offer an option for bicycle commuting and for people with health limitations.

Bike check
Before biking, you should regularly inspect your bicycle or take it to a bike shop for inspection.

Air: Tires should be at the recommended pressure and in good condition.

Brakes: You should be able to easily reach the brake levers, and the brakes should stop the wheels.

Chain: The chain should spin and change the gears as needed, and be properly oiled and free of rust.

Lights: More light means greater visibility. Bikes require a white front light that is visible from at least 500 feet and a red rear reflector that is visible at least 600 feet to the rear after dusk. Page 33 offers more information.
Bike helmets
All cyclists should wear a helmet. This safety measure greatly reduces the risk of serious brain injury from a crash.

There is no statewide helmet law, but the (§ 46.2-906.1) gives a county, city, or town the authority to require anyone 14 years old or younger to wear a helmet when riding or being carried on a bicycle. The Virginia Department of Transportation maintains a list of local ordinances at virginiadot.org/programs/bikeped/laws_and_safety_tips.asp#Helmet%20use.

When buying a helmet, look for the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) label. Helmets should sit level on your head and not shift with movement. V-straps should fit beneath your ear lobes. The chin strap should be snug, with about two fingers’ width under your chin.


If you crash it, trash it. If a helmet hits a hard surface in a crash, you should replace it due to potentially hidden damage to the helmet.

Biking Tips
- Wear a helmet and dress for safety by wearing reflective clothing and securing loose pant legs and shoelaces.
- Carry gear in a manner that will not obstruct your vision or control over your bike.
- Ride defensively by anticipating the actions of other road users and watching for road hazards.
- Pass with care, because turning vehicles may not be able to see you.
- Maximize your visibility at twilight, at night, and in rainy conditions by using reflective tape on the bicycle along with required bike lights.
- Walk bicycles in traffic situations beyond cycling abilities. Walk on the right side of your bike for safety.
- Use caution around buses and large trucks, especially when they are pulling to and from curbs and when passengers are getting on and off. Avoid blind spots and give large vehicles plenty of room to maneuver.
- Don’t block sidewalks, handicap and building accesses, or emergency drives.
Street Travel

Confident cyclists may ride on the road. They must operate as a vehicle and obey traffic rules, just like a car driver would.

Every person riding a bicycle on a highway shall be subject to the provisions of the Code of Virginia section on motor vehicles and shall have the rights and duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle unless a provision clearly indicates otherwise. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-800

Ride RIGHT
Cyclists use the right side of a two-way road.

How far to the right?
Cyclists should not hug the curb or road edge, since this position makes them less visible to drivers, promotes unsafe motorist passing, and exposes cyclists to various hazards. They should position themselves to maximize visibility and vantage, and to discourage drivers from taking a right turn into their pathway. Cyclists may use the right shoulder or take the lane.

Keep a safe distance
Cyclists should avoid traveling too close to parked cars to reduce the risk of having a door open in front of them, even if there is a bike lane.

The cyclist in the illustration on the next page is correct. He has taken the lane and is traveling at least five feet from parked cars to stay out of their door-opening zone.

Virginia law fines drivers who open a vehicle door on the side of passing traffic without confirming that it was “reasonably safe to do so.” –Code of Virginia § 46.2-818.1
**Take the lane**
Cyclists can be seen by motorists and are less likely to be passed too closely when they “take the lane.” Ride near the center of any travel lane of ordinary width (10-12 feet), when traveling close to the speed of other traffic and when approaching intersections, driveways, and alleys. Controlling the lane improves your visibility by keeping out of motorists’ blind spots. It improves positioning at intersections to reduce conflicts with turning traffic. It also discourages drivers from trying to squeeze by within the same lane when there is inadequate space.

**Choose a lane**
When approaching an intersection, cyclists should select the rightmost lane that serves their destination. Do not ride in a turn lane unless you are planning to turn, and do not travel between lanes of traffic moving in the same direction, except where one lane is a separate or mandatory turn lane.

**NEVER FACE traffic**
Riding a bike the wrong way through traffic is against the law and is a leading cause of crashes. Never ride against traffic, even in bike lanes. Cyclists may think they are safe if looking at oncoming traffic, but it is more dangerous. If hit head on, the impact would be greater than if hit from behind. When wrong-way riding, you can’t see signs and traffic signals. Also, drivers are not expecting cyclists to be approaching from that direction.

**Bicycling WITH TRAFFIC**
In Virginia, bicycles are vehicles when on the road. Cyclists and motorists share mutual rights and responsibilities as users of public roads. When cyclists are in command of their bikes and when motorists see them acting predictably, the roads are safer for everyone.

**Sharrows**
Shared Lane Markings (sharrows) are road markings used to indicate the safest place to ride within a travel lane. Sharrows don’t need a sharrow to take the lane. Sharrows are used next to parked cars to alert cyclists that car doors may open unexpectedly and on lanes that are too narrow for cars and bicycles to travel comfortably side by side in the same lane. Occasionally, sharrows are used on steep downhill slopes to allow cyclists more maneuvering space to react when traveling at a high speed.
Bicycling across railroad tracks
Cyclists must cross railroad tracks carefully. Watch for uneven pavement and grooves that could catch a wheel. Stay in control of your bike, rise from the seat, and bend your arms and legs so your body acts like a shock absorber.

If the tracks cross the road at a sharp angle, cyclists should signal and scan for approaching traffic and angle the bike to cross perpendicular to the tracks.

Take a class
Classes offer opportunities to learn how to ride a bike in a safe environment, improve riding skills, and increase rider confidence. Bicycle education courses, offered by instructors certified by the League of American Bicyclists (LAB), are designed for people of all ages and riding abilities. Visit bikeleague.org for details.

Bike lanes
Virginia Code § 46.2-100 defines bike lanes for bicycles, e-bikes, motorized skateboards and scooters, and mopeds. Bike lanes are marked with white lines and icons/symbols or colored pavement.

Ride in a straight line
Ride your bike in a steady, predictable manner; do not weave in and out between parked cars. Drivers can’t always see you in parking areas and may unintentionally squeeze by you when they try to merge back into traffic.

Cycling side by side
Two bicyclists may ride side by side. Riding side by side and taking the lane will discourage cars from improperly passing bicycles in their lane.

Cars must change lanes to pass unless they can provide at least 3 feet of space staying in their existing lane. Cars are allowed cross the double yellow line when it is safe to pass. –Code of Virginia 46.2-804

Be aware
People biking should use mirrors and/or turn their head and look back to scan, just as they would if driving a motorized vehicle.

In Virginia, it’s against the law for people biking to wear earphones in both ears while riding. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-1078

People biking must audibly warn people walking when passing them, preferably with a bell. They must always pass on the left.
Comfort Levels

Before a bicycle trip, plan to ensure the route is safe. Resources produced by local governments, as well as online mapping tools, allow cyclists to know the road conditions they will encounter and plan according to their skill level.

**Easy:** Multi-use paths and quiet neighborhood streets (recommended for users of all ages and abilities due to lower traffic speeds and volume).

**Medium:** Roads with moderate volume of traffic, where riders may interact more with motor vehicles, especially at intersections.

**Challenging:** Routes with higher traffic volumes or high traffic speeds, often without bike lanes or shoulders.

Riding on Sidewalks

Bicyclists are permitted to ride on sidewalks (unless prohibited by the local jurisdiction). Cyclists who feel more comfortable riding on sidewalks must follow pedestrian rules at crosswalks. When riding on the sidewalk, you must maintain a lower speed and yield to pedestrians.

Do not weave between the sidewalk and road by hopping the curb or using driveway cuts. Ride with consistency and predictability.

Paths and Trails

**Shared-use paths and recreational trails**

Shared-use paths and recreational trails are physically separated from motor vehicle traffic by an open space or barrier. They are located within the highway right of way or within a separate right of way. Shared-use paths may be used by cyclists, pedestrians, skaters, users of wheelchair conveyances, joggers, and others. Faster users must yield to those who are moving slower.

**Bicycling with pedestrians and animals on the trail**

Cyclists must watch for unpredictable users such as young children, skaters, and dogs. If approaching a horse on a trail, cyclists can avoid scaring them by slowing down. Gently saying “hello there” or “is it safe to pass?” can calm a horse and rider. In tight places, cyclists should dismount and walk past.
Ride on the right on shared-use paths, except to pass on the left.

When crossing a road at mid-block, watch for oncoming traffic and look **LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT**. All path users must obey signals.

Cyclists have the rights and responsibilities of pedestrians when on a shared-use path. Cyclists must yield to pedestrians and give an audible signal like ringing a bell or saying the word “passing.” –*Code of Virginia 46.2-904*

On multi-use trails and on the road, cyclists must obey the laws pertinent to the trail or road.

**Crosswalks**
Yield to pedestrians when riding a bike. Cyclists *must* yield to people walking in marked and unmarked crosswalks.

**Signals**

**Hand signals**
Before turning or moving, cyclists should always look behind for, and yield to, any closely approaching traffic in their new line of travel. To signal a left turn, look behind and then hold out the left arm. To signal a right turn, look behind and then either hold out the right arm or hold the left arm up, with elbow bent up. Return both hands to the handlebar before maximize control while turning. To signal a stop hold either arm down at an angle, but use both hands for braking when necessary.

**Traffic signals**
Some traffic signals are triggered by electrically charged wires buried under the pavement. As a vehicle passes over them, the metal in the vehicle disrupts the current, turning the signal. Not all bicycles have enough metal to trip the signal. To trigger a camera, “white line get behind” is common practice. Some jurisdictions may have a bicycle symbol near the line to show where to stop to turn the signal. If a light does not trigger, a cyclist may move forward to let a car trigger the signal, go to the sidewalk and cross with pedestrians, or proceed with caution after waiting two minutes or through two cycles if all traffic is clear.

**Turns**

**Turning right**
Cyclists should always scan for vehicles that may be turning right. Signal ahead of the intersection and turn right from the right side of a straight lane or right turn lane if available. Stop at red lights before turning right, just as motorists are supposed to do.
Turning left

The illustration to the right shows how bicycles turn left as a vehicle. Cyclists must:

- Look over their left shoulder for traffic while approaching the intersection. They should practice this until they can perform it without swerving.
- Watch for approaching motor vehicles.
- Signal a left turn.
- When traffic is clear, move to the left side of the lane (on a two-lane road), left lane, or left turn lane, whichever is appropriate.
- Be positioned so vehicles going straight through can’t pass them on the left.
- Yield to oncoming vehicles before turning.
- If riding in a bike lane or on a road with several lanes, look and signal before each lane change.
- Never make a left turn from the right side of the road.

If less comfortable in traffic, cyclists should use the crosswalks and:

- Cross as a pedestrian in the crosswalk.
- If there is a signal, wait for the green or WALK signal before crossing.

Passing

Passing requires special caution. Cyclists should watch for vehicles planning to turn right at an intersection or driveway. They should not pass to the right of motorists at intersections, because drivers might turn right and may not see the cyclist. Avoid the motorist’s blind spot or other position where visibility is limited. Stay in front of or behind vehicles to remain visible at all times. On a shared-use path, call out or ring a bell and pass on the left. Virginia Code allows bikes to pass on right or on the left. See § 46.2-907.

Motorists should not drive in a bike lane, but may turn across a bike lane after using signals. Cyclists should be aware of this risk.
Turning Vehicles

Be visible and be aware
Cyclists must always be prepared to stop suddenly or take other action to avoid collisions.

1. Watch others who are waiting at stop signs or in driveways, or who are in parking spaces. They may be preparing to pull out.

2. Look out for others who may not see you when preparing to turn.

3. Watch for oncoming traffic that may be preparing to turn left.

Traveling at night, in rain, low light, or snowy conditions
Make yourself visible by using lights and reflectors on your bike and wearing reflective or bright-colored clothes like white, yellow, or lime-green. Avoid red clothing as it looks black in the fading light.

By law, every bicycle ridden between sunset and sunrise must have (§ 46.2-1015):

- At least one white headlight on the front of the bike from a distance of at least 500 feet (10-watt halogen, 1-watt LED minimum).
- A red rear reflector visible from 600 feet, or a taillight emitting red plainly visible to at least 500 feet. Rear lights are safer than reflectors.

Taillights may be steady or blinking and may be attached to the bicycle or rider. Additional lights and reflectors improve visibility, even during the day.

Take extra care when daylight saving time changes, as it gets dark earlier and crash rates tend to increase.
Commuting By Bike

Always carry identification and medical insurance information, especially when alone. Before deciding to commute by bicycle, consider the length of the trip, the amount of motor vehicle traffic, and the terrain. Choose routes with less traffic and accommodations for people biking—such as bike lanes, wider lanes, or shared-use paths—to make the ride safer. Carry a map or plan an alternate route in case of a detour.

Commuting on shared-use paths not required

Shared-use paths are often used for recreation. Cyclist commuters and fast-moving road bikers are not required to use these unless a sign is posted prohibiting them from the road. Use care when passing slower users on these paths.

Motorized Skateboards or Scooters, and Electric Power-Assisted Bicycles

Motorized Skateboards or Scooters, and Electric Power-assisted Bicycles (e-bikes) are vehicles that need to follow the law (Code Chapter 46.2, 46.2-100, 46.2-903, 46.2-908.1, 46.2-914, 46.2-915.2, 46.2-1051).

The term “electric power-assisted bicycle” means a vehicle that travels on not more than three wheels in contact with the ground and is equipped with (i) pedals that allow propulsion by human power and (ii) an electric motor with an input of no more than 1,000 watts that reduces the pedal effort required of the rider and ceases to provide assistance at 20 miles per hour. An electric power-assisted bicycle is considered a vehicle when operated on a highway.
The term “motorized skateboard or scooter” includes vehicles with speeds no more than 20 mph with or without handlebars, but does not include “electric personal assistive mobility devices.” Motorized skateboards and scooters shall be considered vehicles when operated on a highway.

Practice Safe Motorized Skateboard or Scooter Riding:
- Keep your eyes on the road.
- Yield to pedestrians.
- Be visible and use lights and reflective gear.
- Obey posted traffic signs and signals.
- Use hand signals.
- Wear a helmet.
- Put away phones and avoid headphones.
- Check to see where skateboards and scooters are allowed to ride.
- You must be at least 14 years old or be under the supervision of someone at least 18 years old to ride these vehicles.

Traffic circles may lower speed in neighborhoods, help traffic flow, and improve safety in uncontrolled intersections.

A second type of roundabout, found in some urban areas, involves multiple lanes and operating at higher speed. Avoid these when cycling.
Sidewalks

Walk the line
Pedestrians may not walk on roadways when usable sidewalks are available. If there is no sidewalk or shoulder, you should walk as close as you can to the outside edge of the roadway, yield right of way to vehicles in the roadway, and walk facing traffic.

Pedestrians and cyclists on the sidewalk
Walkers should always be listening for approaching bicycles.

Paths and Trails

Shared-use paths and recreational trails
Faster-moving users must yield to slower path and trail users. Watch for dogs on leashes, children learning to bike, skaters, or in some cases, horses. When approaching animals, avoid scaring them by slowing down.

Pedestrians should stay to the right on shared-use paths, except to pass on the left.

All path users must obey signals. At mid-block crossings with the road, watch for oncoming traffic. Look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT.
Crosswalks

Scan and cross
You are required by law to cross roads at crosswalks whenever possible. Drivers should expect to see pedestrians crossing at crosswalks and intersections even when crosswalks are not marked on the pavement. Many pedestrian crashes occur when crossing.

Crossing the street mid-block is unsafe, resulting in the most car-pedestrian crashes, so always cross at intersections.

Before crossing, all people walking must stop, look LEFT-RIGHT-LEFT-STRAIGHT-BACK, and then check over their shoulder for turning traffic.

Give motorists room to yield
Although you have the right of way in a crosswalk, it is unsafe to step off a curb into the path of a vehicle. Allow drivers time to yield.

No pedestrian shall enter or cross an intersection in disregard of approaching traffic. –Code of Virginia § 46.2-924

Motorists and bicyclists must yield to people walking
Motorists and cyclists must yield to people walking in crosswalks, both marked and unmarked.

Pedestrians’ Side of the Road
When a sidewalk or trail is not available, walk on the LEFT side of the road facing traffic. When there is no sidewalk or shoulder, you should walk as near as safely able to an outside edge of the roadway.

Turning Vehicles
Pedestrian crossing
To make sure you are seen, make eye contact with drivers, particularly those turning right.
Be alert
Walk cautiously and:
- Watch for vehicles waiting at stop signs, in driveways, or in parking spaces. They may be preparing to pull out.
- Look out for vehicles who may not see you when preparing to turn.
- Watch for oncoming traffic that may be preparing to turn left.

Walking at Night
Pedestrians should increase their visibility by using lights and reflectors and wearing reflective or bright colors such as white, yellow, or lime-green clothing. Avoid red since it looks black in the fading light.

Take extra care when daylight saving time changes, when it stays dark later or gets dark earlier.

Commuting with Buses and Transit
Tips for exiting and entering traffic from buses and other transit:
- Use crosswalks and obey pedestrian signals.
- To avoid a crash, pedestrian commuters should leave a safe distance between themselves and the curb when walking, boarding, or exiting transit.
- Buses and surrounding traffic have limited visibility. Commuters must use extra caution. After exiting, wait until the bus leaves and traffic clears before crossing the street at intersections. Or, if crossing in front of the bus, allow enough space in front so the bus driver can see you.
- Commuters should not run for the bus. In a rush, people often focus on their destination rather than their surroundings, putting themselves and others at a greater risk of a crash.

Double Threat
Watch for cars passing stopped vehicles when crossing the street and those that may be hidden behind them.
Walking or Riding a Bike to School

According to the SRTS program, children who walk and bike to school arrive alert and ready to learn.

The Safe Routes to School program assists localities, schools, and non-profit groups with developing plans, activities, and infrastructure improvements that encourage and enable children to walk or bike to school. Visit saferoutesinfo.org to learn more.

Dangers of Impaired Walking

According to 2019 Virginia crash data, 24% of pedestrian fatalities were drinking.

Resources for Learning More

- **AAA | Safety resources | exchange.aaa.com/safety**
- **AARP | Livable communities offers resources including tools for walkability | aarp.org/livable-communities**
- **Alexandria Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee | Includes details on classes and events | alexandriabpac.wordpress.com**
- **Alexandria Families for Safe Streets | A local pedestrian safety and crash survivors group promoting safer streets | alxffss.org**
- **America Walks | Advocacy for local, state, and national pedestrian issues | americawalks.org**
- **Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute | A clearinghouse of bicycle helmet information serving consumers, parents, teachers, the media, and more | bhsi.org**
- **Bike Arlington | bikearlington.com**
- **Bike Loudoun | bikeloudoun.org**
- **Bike Virginia | Runs statewide bicycle trips | bikevirginia.org**
- Bike Walk RVA Sports Backers | sportsbackers.org

- City of Alexandria GO Alex | Active transportation resource in Northern Virginia | alexandriava.gov/GOAlex

- Drive Smart Virginia | Non-profit organization to raise awareness and change behavior for safer roadways in Virginia | drivesmartva.org

- Dutch Reach Project | dutchreach.org

- Fairfax Alliance for Better Bicycling | Offers classes and opportunities to improve cycling in Fairfax | fabb-bikes.org

- DMV Towards Zero Deaths | Outreach and education tools to eliminate traffic deaths in Virginia | tzdva.org


- League of American Bicyclists | Promotes bicycling for fun, fitness, and transportation; certifies bicycling instructors; and advocates for bicycle-friendly communities, regions and states | bikeleague.org

- Loudoun Commuter Services | loudoun.gov/commute

- National Highway Traffic Safety Administration | Pedestrian safety program with publications, activities, information about National Safe Routes to School program, and more | nhtsa.gov/road-safety/pedestrian-safety

- Northern Virginia Families for Safe Streets | novasafestreets.org

- Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center | Resources to increase the viability of walking and bicycling as a means of transportation and physical activity | pedbikeinfo.org

- Richmond Area Bicycling Association | raba.org

- Safe Routes to School | Program that assists interested localities, schools, and non-profit groups in making bicycling and walking to school safer and more appealing to children | virginiadot.org/programs/srts.asp

- Street Smart | Public safety program of the District of Columbia, Maryland, and Virginia | mwco.org/transportation/planning-areas/walking-and-biking/streetsmart-safety-campaign
• **U.S. Department of Federal Highway Administration** | Pedestrian Safety Resources | [safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike](http://safety.fhwa.dot.gov/ped_bike)

• **Virginia Bicycling Federation** | Volunteer organization working to promote bicycling; change public policy and community attitudes; and improve the safety, convenience, and acceptance of bicycling throughout Virginia | [vabike.org](http://vabike.org)


• **Virginia Maps** | Bicycling in Virginia | [virginiadot.org/programs/bikeped/maps.asp](http://virginiadot.org/programs/bikeped/maps.asp)

• **Washington Area Bicyclist Association** | Bicycling advocacy group for Metro-DC area offers many resources | [waba.org](http://waba.org)

• **Women and Bicycles** | [waba.org/programs/women-bicycles](http://waba.org/programs/women-bicycles)

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**Credits**

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Laws and Safety Tips for Motorists, Bicyclists, and Pedestrians
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