

## BICYCLE SAFETY

Do you know your rights and responsibilities on the road? Here is a summary of Massachusetts' bike law that covers equipment, riding, safety standards, races, violations, and penalties.

For exact requirements, please read the complete text of the laws pertaining to bicyclists and bicycling in *Massachusetts. General Laws of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Chapter 85, Section 11B.*

### Your rights

- You may ride your bicycle on any public road, street, or bikeway in the Commonwealth, except limited access or express state highways where signs specifically prohibiting bikes have been posted.
- You may ride on sidewalks outside business districts, unless local laws prohibit sidewalk riding.
- You may use either hand to signal stops and turns.
- You may pass cars on the right.
- If you carry children or other passengers inside an enclosed trailer or other device that will adequately restrain them and protect their heads in a crash, they need not wear helmets.
- You may hold a bicycle race on any public road or street in the Commonwealth, if you do so in cooperation with a recognized bicycle organization, and if you get approval from the appropriate police department before the race is held.
- You may establish special bike regulations for races by agreement between your bicycle organization and the police.
- You may have as many lights and reflectors on your bike as you wish.

### Your responsibilities: you **MUST** do these things

- You must obey all traffic laws and regulations of the Commonwealth.
- You must use hand signals to let people know you plan stop or turn (unless you cannot do so safely using hand signals.)
- You must give pedestrians the right of way.
- You must give pedestrians an audible signal before overtaking or passing them.
- You may ride two abreast, but must facilitate passing traffic. This means riding single file when faster traffic wants to pass, or staying in the right-most lane on a multi-lane road.
- You must ride astride a regular, permanent seat that is attached to your bicycle.
- You must keep one hand on your handlebars at all times.
- If you are 16 years old or younger, you must wear a helmet that meets U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requirements on any bike, anywhere, at all times. The helmet must fit your head and the chin strap must be fastened. Note: Under MGL Chapter 85, Section 11B1/2. Any person 16 years of age or younger operating in-line skates, a skate board, a scooter or other manually-propelled wheeled vehicle or riding

as a passenger on any such manually-propelled vehicle on a public way, bicycle path or on any other public right-of-way shall wear a helmet. Such helmet shall fit the person's head and be secured by straps at all times while operating in line skates, scooters, skate board or other manually-propelled wheeled vehicle and shall meet the standards for helmets established by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI Z 90.4) or subsequent standards or the Snell Memorial Foundation's 1984 standard for use in bicycling or subsequent standards. A violation of this section shall not be used as evidence of contributory negligence in a civil action.

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- A city or town shall not adopt any by-laws or ordinances to change the standards required by this section.
- You must use a white headlight and red taillight or rear reflector if you are riding anytime from 1/2 hour after sunset until 1/2 hour before sunrise.
- At night, you must wear ankle reflectors if there are no reflectors on your pedals.
- You must notify the police of any accident involving personal injury or property damage over \$100.

**Your responsibilities: you MAY NOT do these things**

- You may not carry a passenger anywhere on your bike except on a regular seat permanently attached to the bike, or to a trailer towed by the bike.
- You may not carry any child between the ages of 1 to 4, or weighing 40 pounds or less, anywhere on a single-passenger bike except in a baby seat attached to the bike. The child must be able to sit upright in the seat and must be held in the seat by a harness or seat belt. Their hands and feet must be out of reach of the wheel spokes.
- You may not carry any child under the age of 1 on your bike, even in a baby seat; this does not preclude carrying them in a trailer.
- You may not use a siren or whistle on your bike to warn pedestrians.
- You may not park your bike on a street, road, bikeway or sidewalk where it will be in other people's way.
- You may not carry anything on your bike unless it is in a basket, rack, bag, or trailer designed for the purpose.
- You may not modify your bike so that your hands are higher than your shoulders when gripping the handlebars.
- You may not alter the fork of your bike to extend it.

**Your responsibilities: equipping your bike**

- Your bike must have a permanent, regular seat attached to it.
- Your brakes must be good enough to bring you to a stop, from a speed of 15 miles an hour, within 30 feet of braking. This distance assumes a dry, clean, hard, level surface.
- At night, your headlight must emit a white light visible from a distance of at least 500 feet. A generator-powered lamp that shines only when the bike is moving is okay.
- At night, your taillight must be red and must be visible from a distance of at least 600 feet.

- At night, your reflectors must be visible in the low beams of a car's headlights from a distance of at least 600 feet. Reflectors and reflective material on your bike must be visible from the back and sides.

### **Penalties**

- Violations of any of these laws can be punished by a fine of up to \$20. Parents and guardians are responsible for cyclists under the age of 18. The bicycle of anyone under 18 who violates the law can be impounded by the police or town selectmen for up to 15 days.

### **Motorist Responsibilities (see MGL Chapter 89, Section 2 and Chapter 90, Section 14)**

- Motorists and their passengers must check for passing bicyclists before opening their door. Motorists and their passengers can be ticketed and fined up to \$100 for opening car or truck doors into the path of any other traffic, including bicycles and pedestrians.
- Motorists must stay a safe distance (recommended minimum of three (3) feet) to the left of a bicyclist (or any other vehicle) when passing. Motorists are also prohibited from returning to the right until safety clear of the bicyclist.
- Motorists must pass at a safe distance. If the lane is too narrow to pass safely, the motorist must use another lane to pass, or, if that is also unsafe, the motorist must wait until it is safe to pass.
- Motorists are prohibited from making abrupt right turns ("right hooks") at intersections and driveways after passing a cyclist.
- Motorists must yield to oncoming bicyclists when making left turns. The law expressly includes yielding to bicyclists riding to the right of other traffic (e.g., on the shoulder), where they are legally permitted but may be more difficult for motorists to see.
- Motorists may not use the fact that bicyclists were riding to the right of traffic as a legal defense for causing a crash with a bicyclist.

*Courtesy of Mass Bike (<http://www.massbike.org/laws>)*

### **Mass General Laws - Bicycles**

Laws for Bicyclists and Motorists in the Presence of Bicyclists (as amended by Chapter 525 of the Acts of 2008). Bicyclists have the right to use all public ways in this state except limited access or express state highways where signs specifically prohibiting bicycles have been posted. When riding on public ways, bicyclists must obey the same basic traffic laws and regulations that apply to motor vehicle operators.

### **The rules for bicycles (including amendments) are listed here. As a bicyclist: (from MGL Chapter 85, Section 11B)**

- You can keep to the right when passing a motor vehicle moving in the travel lane.

- You must signal your intent by either hand to stop or turn. However, the signal does not have to be continuous or be made at all if both hands are needed for the bicycle's safe operation.
- You can ride on sidewalks outside of business districts for safety unless banned locally.
- If on the sidewalk, you must yield to pedestrians and give an audible signal before overtaking or passing (no sirens or whistles).
- No more than two bicycles can be operated side-by-side. On a roadway with more than one lane in the direction of travel, bicyclists riding side-by-side must stay in one lane and not unnecessarily restrict a passing vehicle's ability to overtake you.
- You must ride on or astride a permanent seat affixed to the bicycle. A passenger must also ride on a permanent seat attached to the bicycle or to a trailer towed by the bicycle.
- You cannot transport a person who is between one and four years old or who weighs 40 lbs. or less except in a "baby seat" attached to the bicycle. The person must be in a harness, be seated in an upright position, and their hands and feet must be protected from hitting the wheel spokes. A person can ride on or astride a seat on a tandem bicycle if the person can reach the pedals and handlebars. You cannot transport a child under the age of one year on a bicycle.
- A bicycle helmet approved by the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission must be worn by a bicycle operator or passenger under 16 years old. It must be secured to the person's head when the bicycle is operated on a public way or bicycle path, unless the passenger is secured in an enclosed trailer which protects his/her head.
- You must give an audible warning (other than a siren or whistle) when necessary to ensure safe operation.
- You can park your bicycle on a way or a sidewalk, but only if it does not obstruct vehicle or pedestrian traffic.
- You cannot let the bicycle be pulled by another vehicle and can only tow a bicycle trailer.
- You cannot carry any objects that would interfere with the safe operation of the bicycle and must keep one hand on the handlebars at all times.
- You must have a proper working brake system to stop from 15 MPH within 30 feet.
- From a half hour after sunset to a half hour before sunrise, you must have a white lamp in front visible from up to 500 feet and a rear facing red light or reflector visible up to 600 feet.
- From a half hour after sunset to a half hour before sunrise, you must have a reflector on each pedal or your ankles, or reflective material on yourself or on the bicycle. The reflectors must be visible up to 600 feet from all sides.
- Your handlebars cannot be set at a height above your shoulders while gripping them and you cannot extend the fork from its original manufacturer's design.
- You must report any crash involving personal injury and any crash involving property damage in excess of \$100 to the police in the municipality where it occurred.

**As a motorist in the presence of bicycles:**

- **Do Not Cut-Off After Passing:** When passing a bicycle traveling in the same direction that is on your right, you must not return to the right until you have safely passed the overtaken bicycle. (Chap. 89, Sec. 2)

- **Do Not Make an Abrupt Turn After Passing:** When passing a bicycle near an intersection or driveway where you want to turn right, you cannot turn unless you are at a safe distance from the bicyclist and you can make the turn at a reasonable and proper speed. (Chap. 90, Sec 14)
- **Do Not Squeeze Bicycles in a Narrow Lane:** If a lane is too narrow to pass a bicycle at a safe distance, be **PATIENT** until you can safely use an adjacent lane or **WAIT** until it is safe to pass in the lane you share. (Chap. 89, Sec. 2)
- **Do Not Fail to Yield When Turning Left:** When turning left at an intersection or into an alley, private road, or driveway, you must yield the right of way to a vehicle approaching from the opposite direction, including a bicycle, if it is in the intersection or close enough to be an immediate hazard. (Chap. 90, Sec 14)
- **Watch for Bicycles on Your Right:** Bicycles can legally ride to the right of motor vehicle traffic. The law says it is not a defense for a motorist causing a crash with a bicycle that the bicycle was to the right of other traffic. (Chap. 85, Sec 11B)
- **Do Not Open a Door Without First Looking:** Drivers and passengers can now be fined up to \$100 for opening a vehicle door into an oncoming bicycle. (Chap. 90, Sec 14) Before opening your door, you should always check behind you to make sure that no bicyclists are approaching.
- **Bicyclists can now ride two bicycles side-by-side.** However, on a road with more than one lane in the direction of travel, they must stay in one lane. (Chap. 85, Sec. 11B)
- **Bicyclists Do Not Always Have to Signal Turns!** Bicyclists must signal their intent by either hand to stop or turn. However, the signal does not have to be continuous or be made at all if both hands are needed for the bicycle's safe operation. (Chap. 85, Sec. 11B)

**If you have questions regarding bicycle safety contact Police Chief John Horvath at 978-546-1212.**