Have you been riding your bicycle on bicycle paths or sidewalks and are now ready to start riding on the road either by yourself or with a club? Or do you just want to know why do bicycle riders sometimes ride on the road? Then this article is for you!

Step 1: Getting Ready

Before you attempt to ride on any road, you should have good control of your bicycle when riding; you should practice:

- Stopping quickly with control
- Maneuvering safely to avoid objects
- Looking all around, including behind you, with control of your bike
- Signal right and left with control

Your bicycle needs to be in good working order. If you haven’t ridden it in a while, have it serviced by a bicycle mechanic. Also, have them check to make sure it fits you (the seat and handlebars are at the right height).

Every time you go out for a ride, even if it is on a bicycle path, you should check your helmet for damage and that it still fits snugly (but comfortably) on your head (adjust if necessary). You should also do the ABC bicycle check:

- A – Air in tires? Pump tires to recommended pressure before every ride. Rock Mill Park has a pump at the bike service station. Tug and spin the wheels to ensure that they are on securely and are true.
- B – Brakes working?
- C – Visual check of the rest of bike
Step 2: Stuff to Bring

So you have your helmet on and your bicycle checked out. All set, right? Well, not quite yet. You need to carry identification with you. Also it is good to have on you or in a bicycle bag:

- Cash/credit card
- Phone
  - Good idea to have ICE (in case of emergency) contacts set up
- Filled water bottle
- Tube, tire levers and CO2 or hand pump
  - REI is a good source for classes on how to fix a flat and bike maintenance
- Disposable gloves or wipes for your hands if you have to put your chain back on
- On longer rides you will want to carry more fluids, food, sunscreen

Do not carry anything that may interfere with the operation of your bicycle.

Now you have all that safe and secure; surely you are ready to ride? In theory, yes, but we want you to do better.

Another piece of safety equipment we highly recommend is a mirror. A small mirror attached to your helmet or bike can help you see traffic behind you, although it’s always best to be able to look behind you while maintaining a straight line.

Also, we want you to be safe; you need to be visible. By Georgia law, cyclists are required to have a white light in front and red rear reflector or light at night. We highly recommend front white lights and red rear lights at all times. Wear bright colors or white. We can’t stress being visible enough! Be safe. Be visible.

Now that you are equipped to ride on roads; let’s talk about the rules.

Step 3: Know the Laws

Georgia’s bicycle laws follow the same rules as a car. There are many places where you can find the laws – the Governor’s Office of Highway Safety puts out a quick reference guide and Georgia Bikes! (georgiabikes.org) compiled a Bicyclist Pocket Guide that can be viewed or downloaded from their website (https://georgiabikes.org/resources/bicyclist-pocket-guide/).

Here are a few of the highlights:

- Ride in the same direction as traffic
- Follow all traffic signs, signals and road markings; don’t cut corners
- Signal your turns with outstretched arms before the turn, but then you can keep both hands on handlebars during the turn
- Ride as near to the right side of the roadway as practicable except when:
  - Turning left
  - Avoiding hazards
  - The lane is too narrow to share safety with a motor vehicle
- Cyclists cannot ride more than two abreast on roads
• Only children under the age of 12 can ride on sidewalks that are not designated for cycling
• Don’t forget to stop for pedestrians in crosswalks!

Other good bicycle riding tips:

• Be predictable
  o Do not pass other riders on the right
  o Call out when passing on the left
  o Maintain your line of travel
    ▪ Ride in a straight line
    ▪ Don’t jump in and out of traffic
• Be aware of your surroundings
• Lane position communicates intention - rule of thirds
  o Imagine travel lane divided into equal thirds
    ▪ Left third for taking a left
    ▪ Middle third for staying straight
    ▪ Right third for taking right
• Give room (3 feet) when passing cars parked in street; you never know when they may open a car door
  o If you can’t move over and you can’t tell if there are people inside, then slow down when passing and proceed as if the car door may open
• If crossing railroad tracks, try to cross with your wheels perpendicular to the tracks
• Do not ride on the road with earpieces or load music playing
• If a driver is aggressive, do not engage them -- do not do anything to escalate the situation

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**Step 4: Some Basic Techniques**

For many of us, we learnt to ride a bicycle as a child and we really don’t think that much about riding techniques. Here are a few basic techniques that will help you be a better cyclist -- please practice any new technique on an empty road before trying it in traffic:

• Starting with a power stroke
  o Start off the seat and straddling the bike
  o Have one pedal in the 2:00 position and put your foot on it (power foot)
  o Keep your other foot on the ground
Simultaneously put weight on power foot and lift yourself in seat

- **Stopping**
  - Before coming to a stop, look ahead and put your bicycle in a ‘proper’ gear
    - Most people will shift down into an easier gear when coming to a stop
    - If you are on an uphill you might want to shift down several gears
  - Put pedals at 12:00/6:00
  - Remove foot in 12:00 while slowing to a stop
  - Step on ground, dismount and straddle bike

- **Shifting review**
  - Try to anticipate the need to shift – easier to shift when there is not a lot of force on pedals
  - Left shifter controls front gears for major, more noticeable changes
  - Right shifter controls rear gears for minor, incremental change

### Step 5: Prepare for the Road

As a cyclist there are many situations that you must be able to handle:

- **Left hand turns and roundabouts require extra care**
  - To prepare to turn left or enter a roundabout, look for a traffic opening, signal, and merge into the traffic lane (take the full lane)
    - If there isn’t an opening then you need to signal and wait for the driver to acknowledge you by slowing down and giving you room
  - Sometimes you may have to cross lanes
  - Go around the turn or roundabout just as you would if you were in a car
  - Pay close attention to drivers around you as sometimes they may do something unexpected (especially in a roundabout)

- **Hills**
  - Anticipate and use your gears to help get you uphill
  - Keep riding in as straight of line as possible
  - If riding in a group, stay behind the person in front of you
    - If no cars are coming and you are in a single file line, and you want to pass to fill a gap, make sure you call out and only pass if you know you can make it
    - Do not pass if you have to cross the yellow line
    - Do not pass if it makes you go more than two abreast

- **Chain dropping**
  - First thing is to safely pull off the road
    - Call out to let others know you are stopping
  - Put on your disposable gloves or get a wipe ready as your hands will get greasy (you’re welcome!)
  - Push the rear derailleur (the small gear that hangs below the rear gears) toward the front wheel to give some slack
  - Grab your chain
  - Put it back onto the chain ring
  - Lift your rear wheel off the group and turn the pedals a few times with your hand just to make sure everything is ok
  - Pack up your disposable gloves or wipes -- don’t leave them on the road side
Step 6: Joining a Group Ride

Cycling with a local bicycle club is a great way to gain strength, learn new skills and meet people. Every club may have specific rules but guidelines are:

- When first joining a group ride, start at lowest level or a level below your perceived level
- Ride smooth
  - Avoid sharp braking
  - Avoid quick maneuvers
  - Avoid quick accelerations/decelerations
- Try to stay about 2 feet from the rider in front of you
  - Leave a little more room on hills
  - As you get better you can tighten it up but good practice is to leave at least 1 foot
- Do not let your front wheel pass the back wheel of the person in front of you (crossing wheels)
- Call out obstacles; no need to call out obvious things
- Call out if you have to stop
- Pass commands forward/backward
- Riding two abreast
  - Groups often ride two abreast for several reasons:
    - Visibility – Too often when there is a vehicle/bicycle accident, we hear that the driver did not see the cyclist. A bicycle group riding two abreast is far more visible than going single file.
    - Easier passing – A compact group of two abreast is approximately the width of a car
    - Social
      - It is up to the ride leader to decide if conditions dictate riders should go two abreast or single file
      - When riding two abreast, keep your handle bars even with the rider next to you.
  - Don’t show strength by
    - Riding in front of ride leaders
    - Passing everyone going up hills
      - It is ok to safely pass to fill a gap
        - If no cars coming, you don’t cross the yellow line and you don’t go more than two abreast
        - Make sure you call out
        - Only start the pass if you know you can make it
    - Riding your bicycle around at stops when group is reforming as it can cause confusion and frustration for drivers

Sounds like a lot? Perhaps. Just take your time. Practice something new each ride. You will be amazed at how quickly you improve. How about some more resources? We look forward to seeing you on the road.

RESOURCES

Our friends at Georgia Bikes created a Web page to aggregate links to videos, activities, and other resources for parents, guardians, relatives, and caregivers interested in teaching bike safety at home. With schools closed, it’s important for children to engage in healthy outdoor exercise.
However, children and adults must ride safely to prevent injuries that could place demands on already burdened healthcare providers and emergency responders.

Remember to ride at least six feet apart from other people who do not live in your household. Please consult the Georgia Bikes Cycling and Coronavirus Web page for more information before going out for a ride.

Teaching Bike Safety At Home
https://georgiabikes.org/bike-education-at-home/

Cycling and Coronavirus COVID-19 Info
https://georgiabikes.org/cycling-and-corona-virus-resources/

About Bike Alpharetta
https://bikealpharetta.org/about/

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The content of this guide has been compiled by volunteers of Bike Alpharetta, Inc. The purpose of the guide is to provide educational information to beginner bicycle riders about safe ways to use a bicycle on roads and pathways. Bicycle activities that are conducted over public roads and facilities can be a hazardous form of recreational and travel, and should be done by qualified participants who are in good health, using good equipment, and obeying traffic laws. All individuals riding bicycles must ride at their own risk and assume all responsibility for themselves and the equipment.

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