

Urban Cycling Tips

*It's easy to feel very uncomfortable when you start cycling on the streets in Dallas...
But the reality isn't bad at all when you follow these simple tips.*

General Tips

- Practice riding your bike until it is second nature. There are too many other hazards to risk being distracted by starting, stopping, signaling, looking behind and gear changing.
- Cycle 3-6 feet away from the curb and 4 feet away from parked vehicles.
- Assume you are invisible to everyone else - always plan your 'escape route'.
- Your main visibility weapon is making eye contact with drivers.
- Anticipation is the most effective way to avoid the majority of accidents.
- Your hearing is far better than that of cocooned motorists; use your ears as an information source. Scan the road ahead with your eyes.
- You can buy a reflective safety vest to increase your visibility day or night. Bright orange flags are also available to increase your visibility.
- Use bike routes, back streets, and trails if you can...they should be safer.
- Look behind, and then signal clearly before changing road position or making maneuvers.
- Trust your feelings - if it seems unsafe, then get off and walk until you're past the danger.
- Always, always, ALWAYS ride your bike on the right side of the road WITH the traffic flow.
- Carry the tools and supplies necessary to fix a flat. Practice, practice, practice. Keeping your tires inflated to their proper level will decrease the possibility of flats greatly.
- Carry a cell phone or a supply of quarters should you need a ride home. You can carry your bike on DART buses and trains if there is available room.

Key Hazards to Watch Out For

- Never pass on the right side of large vehicles (between vehicle and curb), especially semis & tractor-trailer trucks, as they may turn unexpectedly leaving you few escape routes; add in parking meters, fire hydrants and sign posts, and it can easily be lethal.
- Assume all the doors of parked cars and stationary taxis will open just as you pass.
- The gutter offers many surprises, which is a good reason to stay away from it: drain gratings can trap your front wheel, potholes breed there, broken glass collects there, and you'll often find bulky objects (including pedestrians who've stepped off the pavement without looking).
- Rain lowers motorist driving standards, makes manhole covers and paint stripes slippery, and affects your braking ability. Frequent gentle application of brakes helps performance.
- Approaching a side road on the right: You should move in the middle of the right hand lane - if you are turning right it will mean you do not need to swerve out, and if you are going straight on it will discourage right turning motorists from trying to overtake you.
- Shopping Bags on handlebars or long flowing clothing will eventually catch in a wheel, throwing you violently off your bike. Get a rear rack and/or front basket. Backpacks will do in a pinch.
- Effective brakes are vital - do not cycle until they work properly. When wet, brakes will not work as well when first applied. See above.
- If a pothole appears just in front, don't swerve out unless you're sure there's no vehicle behind. If you can do it safely, stand up on your pedals before you hit the hole. Practice "bunny hopping" your bike so that you can hop over some potholes.
- Night - always use lights - a reflective yellow vest is also very effective.
- Keep hydrated. In hot weather, drink plenty of water before, during, and after riding. The exertion of riding, combined with the constant breeze caused by cycling, will cause you to lose more fluid through evaporation than you are aware.

Playing the Percentages

83% of serious road bicycle accidents do not involve a motor vehicle. Of these the most likely causes are: wet roads, bag/clothing caught in wheel, bike mechanical failure (brakes, chain falling off), cycling from sidewalk onto a road, and collisions with pedestrians and animals.

Traffic Regulations

You must obey the same traffic laws as motorists. There are occasions when you may feel you need to infringe a traffic regulation in order to remain safe - you may have a moral right to do so, but the law will not recognize this unless the situation is exceptional. And flagrantly flouting the rules of the road brings cycling into disrepute; furthermore, your actions may irritate a motorist so much that they take it out on the cyclist behind you.

The Law: Bicycles are Vehicles

Every person riding a bicycle shall be granted all rights and be subject to all duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle.

Sec. 551.101 Texas Transportation Code

The Prophet: John Forester's Dictum

Cyclists fare best when they act as, and are treated as, the drivers of other vehicles.

On-Line Dallas Bike Commuter Map

A map of the Dallas Bike Plan is available on-line. Go to www.dallascityhall.com and follow the Online Services button to the Interactive City Map. This is a scalable map that can also display aerial photographs of the City. At the bottom of the Map Legend (left hand side of page) is a link to access more features. Click this link to get an expanded map legend, and then select Bike Routes and Bike Trails. All City streets that are part of the 800 lane-mile Dallas Bike Plan will now be displayed.

For more information, contact:

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This information has been adapted, with supplementation, from the website of BikeFix London, UK. (www.bikefix.co.uk)
No local bike shops were harmed in this production.