



## Bicyclist Pocket Guide

2nd Edition

2013

[GeorgiaBikes.org](http://GeorgiaBikes.org)

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*Bicyclist Pocket Guide* is produced and published by Georgia Bikes, Inc., a nonprofit organization promoting bicycling and working to improve bicycling conditions throughout Georgia.

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## Quick Reference

- ⇒ **Bicycles are vehicles** and have the same rights and responsibilities on public roads as motor vehicles.
- ⇒ Bicyclists are safest and most visible when they **travel on the roadway, not the sidewalk**. Sidewalk cycling is illegal for anyone over the age of 12 in GA.
- ⇒ **Bicycles must travel in the same direction as motor vehicle traffic**, even when in a designated bike lane.
- ⇒ **Cyclists can— and should - take the whole travel lane where there are poor road conditions**, such as debris or potholes, or if the road is too narrow to share safely.
- ⇒ **Bicyclists may lawfully ride two abreast**.
- ⇒ Motor vehicles must provide at least **three feet of safe passing distance** when overtaking a bicyclist.
- ⇒ **Aggressive driving** is considered a misdemeanor of high and aggravated nature in GA.

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**A bicycle is a vehicle and should be operated as such:**

- ⇒ Always obey traffic signs and signals
- ⇒ Be predictable
- ⇒ Signal your intentions
- ⇒ Drive on the right-hand side of the road
- ⇒ Yield when changing lanes
- ⇒ Position yourself in the lane based on your destination

**A visible cyclist is a safe cyclist.**

At night or in low-light conditions, wear visible clothing and use a bright, white front light and a red rear light.

Cyclists fare best when they act like and are treated as operators of vehicles.

## 2. Rules of the Road

### State Laws for Bicyclists

#### Number of Riders

A bicycle may not be used to carry more persons at one time than the **number for which it is designed** or equipped; an adult bicyclist may carry a child in a sling, child seat or trailer designed to carry children. [§40-6-292 (c,d)]



#### Clinging to Vehicles

No person riding a bicycle shall attach him or herself to any other vehicles upon the roadway. [§40-6-293]

## 1. Legal Status of Bicyclists

### A bicycle is defined as a vehicle in Georgia.

*Relevant state laws referenced in brackets.*

A bicycle with an electric helper motor is included in this definition. A person operating a bicycle is not required to have a driver's license.

[§40-1-1(15)]

[§40-1-1(75)]

A person in control of a vehicle on a street or highway is a "driver." *(As a driver, a bicyclist must follow the traffic rules common to all drivers. As the driver of a bicycle, she or he must also obey rules adopted especially for bicycles.)*

[§40-1-1(14)]

**A cyclist has all of the rights to the roadway applicable to any driver**, except as to the special regulations for bicycles. Cyclists who violate traffic laws will be subject to the same penalties as drivers of motor vehicles, except that no penalty shall be assessed against a cyclist's motor vehicle driver's license.

### Riding on Roadways and Bicycle Paths

Every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to the right side of the roadway as **practicable\*** except when

- ⇒ turning left
- ⇒ avoiding hazards to safe cycling
- ⇒ the lane is too narrow to share safely with a motor vehicle [§40-6-294]

The term 'hazards to safe cycling' includes, but is not limited to: surface debris, rough pavement, drain grates which are parallel to the side of the roadway, parked or stopped vehicles, potentially opening car doors, or any other objects which threaten the safety of a person operating a bicycle.



**\* "Practicable" means whatever you can do safely!**

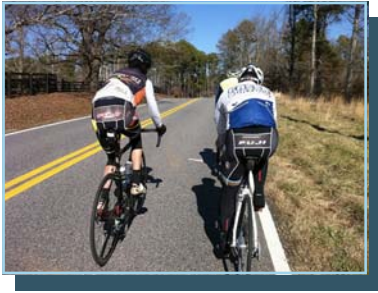
Any person operating a bicycle in a bicycle lane shall **ride in the same direction as traffic** on the roadway.

[§40-6-294(f)]

### Riding Two Abreast

Persons riding bicycles upon a roadway shall **not ride more than two abreast except on bicycle paths, bicycle lanes, or parts of roadways set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles**, or when a special event permit issued by a local governing authority permits riding more than two abreast.

[§40-6-294]



### Riding on Sidewalks

**No person (over age 12) shall drive any vehicle upon a sidewalk** or sidewalk area except upon a permanent or duly authorized driveway.

[§40-6-144]

### Carrying Bags and Packages

No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle, or other article which prevents him or her from **keeping at least one hand upon the handlebars**.

[§40-6-295]

### Lights and Visibility

Every bicycle when in use at nighttime shall be equipped with a **white front light** visible from a distance of **300 feet** and with a **red rear light** visible from a distance of 300 feet **or a red rear reflector** (*Additional lighting is permitted and highly recommended!*)



[§40-6-296(a)]

### Brakes

Every bicycle sold or operated shall be equipped with a brake which will enable the operator to make the braked wheels skid on dry, level pavement.

[§40-6-296(b)]

### Handlebars

No bicycle shall be equipped or operated while equipped with a set of handlebars so raised that the operator must elevate his hands above his shoulders in order to grasp the normal steering grip area.

[§40-6-296(c)]

### Bicycle Helmet



A bicycle rider or passenger **under 16 years of age must wear a bicycle helmet** that:

- ⇒ is of good fit
- ⇒ is fastened securely
- ⇒ meets a nationally recognized standard

[§40-6-296(e)]

### Obedience to Traffic Control Devices

**A driver must obey all applicable traffic control devices** (signs, markings, and traffic signals).

[§40-6-20(a)]

### Stop Signs and Yield Signs

Except when directed by a police officer, **every driver of a vehicle approaching a stop sign shall stop** at a clearly marked stop line.

After stopping the driver shall yield the right of way to any vehicle in the intersection or approaching on another roadway so closely as to constitute an immediate hazard. [§40-6-72(b)]

The driver of a vehicle approaching a yield sign shall slow down to a speed reasonable for existing conditions, and if required for safety to stop at a clearly marked stop line, if there is no stop line, before entering the crosswalk on the near side of the intersection or, if there is no crosswalk, at the point nearest the intersecting roadway where the driver has a view of approaching traffic on the

intersecting roadway before entering it. After slowing or stopping the driver shall yield the right of way to any vehicle in the intersection or approaching on another roadway so closely as to constitute an immediate hazard. If such a driver is involved in a collision with a vehicle in the intersection after driving past a yield sign without stopping, such collision shall be deemed prima-facie evidence of his failure to yield the right of way.

[§40-6-72(c)]



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### Passing on the Right

The driver of a vehicle may overtake and pass upon the right of another vehicle only under the following conditions:

- ⇒ When the vehicle being overtaken is making or about to make a left turn; or
- ⇒ Upon a street or highway with unobstructed pavement of sufficient width for two or more lanes of moving vehicles in the direction being traveled by the overtaking vehicle.

[§40-6-43(a)(1,2)(b)]

Such movement shall not be made by driving off the roadway.

*A cyclist traveling in a bicycle lane, or in a shared lane wide enough for motor vehicles and bicycles to share, may pass motor vehicles on the right, but she or hhe must take care to avoid right-turning vehicles.*

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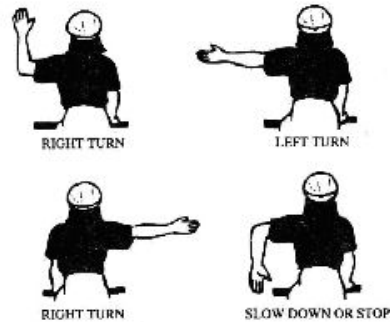
### Signaling a Turn or Stop

Any stop or turn signal when required shall be given either by means of the hand and arm or by signal lights [§40-6-124(a)].

If a cyclist needs both hands for control, the signal need not be given continuously.

- ⇒ Left turn – left hand and arm extended horizontally
- ⇒ Right turn – left hand and arm upward or by right hand and arm horizontally extended
- ⇒ Stop or decrease speed – left hand and arm extended downward.

[§40-6-125 and §40-6-291]



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### Special Protection for Bicyclists on the Road

#### Car Passing a Bicycle

The operator of a motor vehicle, when overtaking and passing a bicycle that is proceeding in the same direction on the roadway, shall leave a safe distance between such vehicle and the bicycle and shall maintain such clearance until safely past the overtaken bicycle. The term '**safe distance**' means not less than three feet.

[§40-6-56]

Please note that cars may cross a solid yellow centerline to pass a cyclist if the oncoming lane is clear and it is safe to pass.

[§40-6-46 (c)]



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### 3. Safe Cycling

Beyond obeying state laws and following the rules of the road, there are simple steps every bicyclist can take to ensure a safe, enjoyable ride.

#### Visibility

Being seen is the single best thing a cyclist can do to avoid a crash with another vehicle. The law requires front white lights and a red rear light/reflector at night, but this equipment is also valuable on shady streets, on cloudy days, and in any low-light situation. High visibility clothing is very important—even in sunny conditions! For nighttime riding, reflective tape or fabric is also strongly recommended.



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#### Predictability

##### Maintain your line of travel

Traffic laws are designed to create predictable behavior, but because bicycles are much smaller than motor vehicles, there is more roadway space in which to operate. Weaving in and out of the travel lane is not predictable and confuses other road users. Riding in a predictable, straight line will significantly reduce the odds of a crash.

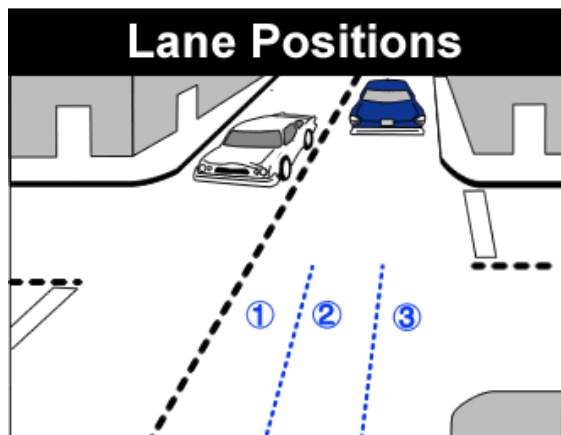
##### “Rule of thirds”: Lane position communicates intention

You can show your intentions— and increase your visibility—through the position you take in the travel lane.

Imagine the travel lane as divided into equal thirds. The third you occupy communicates your intended destination: If you’re making a left turn, move into the left-most third of the lane. If you’re continuing straight through an intersection, position yourself in the middle third, and move into the right-most third for a right turn.

Together with arm signals, using the “rule of thirds” will help other road users better predict your movements and will make you more visible to motorists.

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#### Defensive Driving

Bicycles are small, and motorists can be distracted by any number of factors.

**Never assume a motorist sees you!**

- ⇒ Make eye contact
- ⇒ Proceed cautiously through intersections
- ⇒ Pay attention. If you ride with earphones, make sure the volume is low enough that you can still hear your surroundings

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#### Using Bicycle Facilities

Thanks to the work of advocacy organizations, many communities are installing bike lanes and building multi-use paths. Using these facilities may seem like common sense, but following the tips below will foster safe, courteous interactions with fellow users.

##### Bike lanes

Bicycle lanes are set aside for preferential use by bicyclists. When properly installed and well maintained, they provide a pleasant, safe space for riding a bike. **You are not required to ride in a bike lane just because it exists**, however! If a bike lane is full of debris, a parked car, or any other hazard, you should carefully merge into the



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shared travel lane until it is safe to move back into the bike lane. Never make a left turn from a right-side bike lane (remember the “rule of thirds”). In general, **use a bike lane when it is safe and convenient to do so based on your destination.** Always look behind you, signal, and yield when moving from a bike lane to another travel lane.

### **Sharrows**

While not a “facility,” sharrows are on -street pavement markings that indicate a preferred bike

route and alert motorists to the presence and typical lane position of bicyclists on the roadway. They can be effective wayfinding signage and can raise awareness of bicyclists on low volume, low-speed roads. When riding on a roadway with sharrows, you are **not required to ride in the space designated by the sharrow.**



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## **Emergency Maneuvers and Maintenance**

On very rare occasion, riding lawfully, predictably, and defensively is not enough. Learning basic emergency handling techniques is essential to minimizing the impact of a crash. These techniques cannot be taught by a pocket guide, but many advocacy organizations host safe cycling courses. Check with your local bicycle advocacy organization to find out about classes near you. Contact us if you need help locating an advocacy group in your area.

Safe cycling classes are often called “Traffic Skills 101,” “Confident Cycling,” or some variation.

In the meantime, make sure you have properly functioning brakes, that your bike is correctly fitted to your height, and that your bicycle is overall in good repair. Your local bike shop will be happy to help you!

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### **Multi-Use Paths**

Whether they’re called greenways, trails, or bike paths, multi-use trails are popular with a wide range of users. Bicyclists, joggers, dog walkers, and equestrians often share these facilities.

On multi-use paths, bicycles can endanger other users due to their relative size and speed.

Whenever riding on a multi-use path, always:

- ⇒ Ride on the right and pass on the left
- ⇒ Announce your intentions with a bike bell or a friendly “Passing on your left!”
- ⇒ Slow down if the path is congested



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## **4. Crashes**

### **Why Crashes Happen**

First off, bicycling is not inherently dangerous! Bicycling is easy, fun, and as safe as any other outdoor activity.

You greatly minimize your risk by obeying the law and by following the tips and advice shared in this Guide.

Only about half of all bicycle crashes that do happen involve a collision with a motor vehicle. These crashes involve bicyclists crashing by themselves due to loss of control.

**Keep your bike in good working condition and pay attention, and you’ll cut your already slim odds of a crash in half!**

The chart on page 25 shows the most typical causes of crashes between bicycles and motor vehicles nationwide. Note that most crashes between bikes and cars occur at intersections and that wrong-way travel by the bicyclist is a major contributing factor. In Georgia, the majority of crashes that cause injury occur in low-light/nighttime conditions on arterial roads.

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Be **predictable, visible and cautious**, and you will enjoy safe, relaxing rides!

|   |     |
|---|-----|
| <b>Cyclist at fault</b>                                     |     |
| Riding against traffic on roadway                           | 15% |
| Failure to yield, entering roadway mid-block                | 10% |
| Failure to yield at stop or yield sign                      | 12% |
| Cycling at night without lights                             | 10% |
| Failure to yield, signalized or uncontrolled intersection   | 7%  |
| <b>Motorist at fault</b>                                    |     |
| Failure to yield at stop or yield sign                      | 10% |
| Failure to yield, entering roadway from driveway            | 7%  |
| Failure to yield, turning left in front of oncoming cyclist | 6%  |
| Failure to yield, signalized or uncontrolled intersection   | 4%  |
| Right turn in front of cyclist                              | 4%  |

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which you require compensation, and then let them know that you expect a prompt response. Be sure to reference the claim number in the letter and include copies of property damage estimates to support your claim.

**4. If necessary, retain an attorney.** If you sustained serious injuries, you may need to work with an attorney. Check in your area for a law office that specializes in bicycle crashes.

For more information about this guide or bicycling in Georgia, please contact:

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706.372.9529  
GeorgiaBikes.org



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## What to do if a crash happens

First & foremost: if you are seriously injured, wait for medical assistance!

The points below are presented as general guidance -not legal advice - for dealing with the aftermath of a collision.

**1. Record the facts.** Write down the date, time, and location of the accident, including the name, address, email, phone number and insurance information for any driver involved in the crash. Also obtain the name, address, email, & phone number of any witness to the incident. Take pictures and video whenever possible.


**2. Hang on to relevant documents.** In addition to your own notes, keep handy all documents related to the accident, such as the police report, medical evaluations, insurance forms, property damage estimates, and written or electronic correspondences.

**3. Follow through on insurance claims.** More often than not, the motorist's insurance company will deny your initial claim. Treat this denial as the beginning of a negotiation, not the end! Insurance companies count on the fact that most people will give up after receiving a denial letter. If you receive a denial letter, wait 45 days after the accident, then send a polite, professional, but firm letter to the insurance company indicating that you will sue the insured if they fail to pay. Mention the Georgia title 33 statute, which compels insurance companies to settle claims in a timely manner (within 60 days) or face a penalty fee. Clearly state the amount for

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A bicycle  
is a  
**VEHICLE**

Same Roads. Same Rights.  
Same Rules.



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