

JOB AID

Driving Safety: Changing Lanes

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Changing positions in moving traffic can be tricky, whether drivers are merging into a lane, entering or exiting a highway or passing other vehicles. By changing lanes safely, drivers can prevent injuries and deaths that happen because of collisions, reduce the costs associated with tickets and accidents, limit physical damage to vehicles and protect their driving licenses and jobs.

Cushion of Safety

Keep the space in front of, behind and around your vehicle free of other vehicles and pedestrians. Make sure you have enough time and space to react to unexpected obstacles. Adjust your speed and position, as needed, to keep the cushion or buffer around your vehicle as it moves.

Be sure to increase your cushion of safety in bad weather or if other hazards are present:

- Limited visibility (darkness, glaring sun, fog, rain, snow)
- Slick road surfaces (rain, snow, ice)
- Unpredictable drivers (speeders, tailgaters, wide loads)

Blind Zones and Mirrors

A **blind zone** is an area, usually behind a vehicle or along its sides, that the driver can't see due to the configuration of the vehicles and mirrors, obstructions or other visual limitations. The larger the vehicle, the larger its blind zones. Drivers must be aware of their blind zones (sides and behind) and stay out of other drivers' blind zones.

Adjusting Mirrors

Adjust mirrors **BEFORE** you drive, while you are parked in a safe location. In your left and right mirrors, you should just **BARELY** see the body of your own vehicle. The view in the rearview mirror should be centered out the back window.

Changing Lanes

Remember that traffic already in the lane has the right-of-way.

Only change one lane at a time and stay in each lane for at least the time your state requires before moving to another lane; most states require at least 2 seconds. Do **NOT** weave in and out of traffic. Always use your turn signals to indicate your intentions.

To safely **change lanes**:

1. Signal your intention well in advance. Most states require you to signal 100 to 300 feet (30 to 90 meters) before you move. Follow your local laws.
2. Check your mirrors in the direction you want to go.
3. Look over your shoulder in the same direction.
4. If it's clear, move into the lane.
5. Turn off your signal, match the speed of traffic and establish a cushion of safety.

When drivers around you indicate that they want to change lanes:

- Give them room and stay visible to them
- Don't speed past them or attempt to go around them
- Be alert for drivers who change lanes quickly or without signaling

When **exiting** a roadway, signal and move into the appropriate lane as soon as possible, at least 250 feet (75 meters) before you want to exit. Check your mirrors and lower your speed.

Merging

Watch for signs that indicate that one lane is ending and joining another lane. Moving vehicles, limited visibility, indecisive drivers, or drivers who make unsafe choices are all possibilities for which drivers should be prepared when lanes merge.

When you merge, yield to drivers already in the lane:

- Signal early
- Watch the traffic and use your mirrors
- Wait for an adequate opening
- Build up speed gradually to merge smoothly

When you see a sign that traffic will merge into your path ahead, make room if you can do so safely, without interrupting the flow of traffic.

Passing

White lines separate lanes with traffic that travels in the same direction. Yellow lines separate lanes with traffic that travels in opposing directions. Generally, drivers may not cross solid dividing lines. They may cross dashed dividing lines when it is safe to do so. Solid lines indicate areas where it is unsafe to pass, such as at sharp turns and at the crest of hills where visibility is obstructed or limited.

Only pass when it is necessary to do so. Signal well in advance and check for traffic before you move into and out of the passing lane. Remember to maintain a cushion of safety around your vehicle during passing maneuvers. Avoid passing to the right or on the shoulder. Do not exceed the speed limit.