



## Virginia Bicycle Laws and Safety Tips

The laws regulating bicycling on Virginia's public highways define the rights and duties of bicyclists as well as the motorists with whom they share the roadway. Bicyclists and motorists basically have the same rights and duties, and the laws governing traffic regulation apply equally to both. The following summary is intended to help bicyclists understand the laws that apply to the operation of bicycles in Virginia.

### Rights and Duties

Every person riding a bicycle on a highway shall be subject to the provisions of the Code of Virginia section on motor vehicles and shall have the rights and duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle unless a provision clearly indicates otherwise.

Bicyclists and other users on sidewalks, shared use paths, and crosswalks have all the rights and duties of a pedestrian under the same circumstance.

Bicyclists and other users of shared use paths crossing highways at clearly marked crosswalks must come to a complete stop at stop signs prior to entering such crosswalk.

On shared use paths crossing highways in marked crosswalks without stop signs or other traffic control signals bicyclists and pedestrians are not required to come to a full stop but must not enter the road in disregard of approaching traffic.

Reference: §§[46.2-800](#), [46.2-904](#), [46.2-924](#) ^

### Definitions

- A **bicycle** is defined as a device propelled solely by human power, upon which a person may ride either on or astride a regular seat attached thereto, having two or more wheels in tandem, including children's bicycles except a toy vehicle intended for use by young children. A bicycle is a vehicle when operated on the highway.
- A **bike lane** is defined as that portion of a roadway designated by signs and/or pavement markings for the preferential use of bicycles, electric power-assisted bicycles, and mopeds.
- A **shared use path** is defined as a bikeway that is physically separated from motorized vehicular traffic by an open space or barrier and is located either within the highway right-of-way or within a separate right-of way. Shared use paths may also be used by pedestrians, skaters, users of wheel chair conveyances, joggers, and other nonmotorized users.
- A **sidewalk** is defined as the portion of a street between the curb lines, or the lateral lines of a roadway, and the adjacent property lines, intended for use by pedestrians.
- A **highway** is defined as the entire width between the boundary lines of every place open to public use for purposes of vehicular travel.
- A **roadway** is defined as the portion of the highway improved, designed, or ordinarily used for vehicular travel, exclusive of the shoulder.
- A **vehicle** is defined as every device used for the transportation of people or property on a highway.

Reference: §[46.2-100](#)

## Traffic Controls

Bicyclists must obey all traffic signs, signals, lights, and markings.

Under certain circumstances bicyclists, motorcycles, and mopeds may proceed through a solid red light at an intersection. A driver or rider may proceed through the intersection on a steady red light only if the driver or rider complies with all five provisions listed below:

1. Comes to a full and complete stop at the intersection for two complete cycles of the traffic light or for two minutes, whichever is shorter
2. Exercises due care as provided by law
3. Otherwise treats the traffic control device as a stop sign
4. Determines that it is safe to proceed
5. Yields the right of way to the driver of any vehicle approaching on such other highway from either direction.

Reference: §§[46.2-830](#), [46.2-833](#)

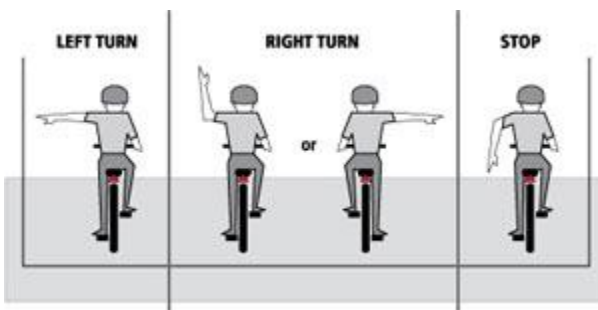
## Where to Ride

- Bicyclists must ride with the flow of traffic on the right side of the highway.
- Bicyclists operating a bicycle on a roadway at less than the normal speed of traffic at the time and place under conditions then existing shall ride as close as safely practicable to the right curb or edge of roadway. Exceptions to this are when bicyclists are overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction, preparing for a left turn, avoiding unsafe conditions, avoiding riding in a lane that turns or diverges to the right, riding on a one way street where bicyclists may ride as near the left-hand curb or edge of roadway, or when the lane width is too narrow to share with a motor vehicle. Additionally, bicycles are not excluded from riding on the highway shoulder.
- Bicyclists must not ride between two lanes of traffic moving in the same direction unless one lane is a separate or mandatory turn lane.
- Bicyclists cannot ride more than two abreast on highways. When riding two abreast, bicyclists cannot impede the movement of traffic and need to move into a single file when being overtaken from the rear. On a laned roadway, bicyclists shall ride in a single lane.
- Bicyclists are not permitted to ride on interstate and certain controlled access highways, unless the operation is limited to bicycle or pedestrian facilities that are barrier separated from the roadway and automobile traffic. The restricted sections of the highways are marked with conspicuous signs.
- Bicycles may be ridden on sidewalks unless prohibited by local ordinance or traffic control devices. While on sidewalks and shared use paths, bicyclists must always yield the right of way to pedestrians and give an audible signal before passing a pedestrian.
- Bicyclists pulling onto a sidewalk or highway from a driveway must yield the right of way to pedestrians or vehicles already on the sidewalk or highway.

Reference: §§[46.2-802](#),[46.2-808](#),[46.2-826](#),[46.2-903](#),[46.2-904](#),[46.2-905](#),[46.2-907](#)

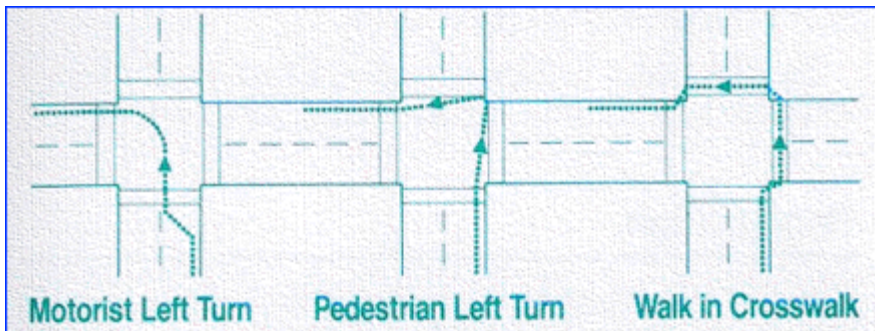
## Changing Directions

Bicyclists must signal their intentions to stop or turn. The proper signals are made with the left arm as follows:



A right turn may be signaled with the right arm. The signals do not have to be given continuously if both hands are needed to control the bicycle.

Bicyclists may make left turns as either motorists or pedestrians do. To make a pedestrian left turn, the bicyclist should continue straight across the intersecting road, obey the traffic signals, turn left at the corner, and proceed as usual. Bicyclists have the option of either riding or dismounting and walking in the crosswalks of the two intersecting roads. If traffic control devices specify the method of crossings, these directions must be followed. Please refer to the examples shown here:



Reference: §§[46.2-846](#),[46.2-847](#),[46.2-848](#),[46.2-849](#)

### Passing

Bicyclists may overtake and pass another vehicle only when safe to do so. Bicyclists may pass another vehicle on the right or left, and they may stay in the same lane, change lanes, or ride off the road if necessary for safe passing. Please note that passing motor vehicles on the right side may be extremely dangerous if the motorist does not see the bicyclist and attempts a right turn.

A person riding a bicycle, electric personal assistive mobility device, electric power-assisted bicycle, motorized skateboard or scooter, or moped shall not travel between two lanes of traffic moving in the same direction, except where one lane is a separate turn lane or a mandatory turn lane.

Effective July 1, 2014, motorists must approach and pass a bicyclist at a reasonable speed **at least three feet** to the left of the bicyclist.

Reference: §§[46.2-839](#),[46.2-907](#)

### Safety Considerations

- Bicyclists must not carry articles which prevent them from keeping at least one hand on the handlebars.
- Bicyclists must not carry more people than the bicycle is designed to accommodate, except for adult bicyclists carrying a child, under six years of age, securely attached to the bicycle in a seat or trailer designed to carry children.
- Bicyclists must not attach themselves or their bicycles to any other vehicle on the roadway.
- Bicyclists are not permitted to wear earphones in both ears while riding a bicycle.

Reference: §§[46.2-906](#),[46.2-932](#),[46.2-1078](#)

### Equipment

Every bicycle ridden between sunset and sunrise must have at least one white headlamp with the light being visible at least 500 feet to the front. The bicycle must have a red reflector on the rear visible at least 600 feet to the rear. On roads posted with speed limit of 35 mph or greater, the bicyclist must additionally be equipped with at least one red taillight visible from 500 feet to the rear. Taillights may be steady or blinking, are allowed under all conditions, and may be attached to the cycle or rider.

Bicycles ridden on highways must have brakes which will skid the wheels on dry, level, clean pavement.

Reference: §§[46.2-1015](#),[46.2-1066](#)

## Helmet Use

Several jurisdictions in Virginia require that every person fourteen years of age or younger shall wear a protective helmet whenever riding or being carried on a bicycle on any highway, sidewalk, or public bicycle path. The jurisdictions reporting such ordinances to VDOT are:

City of Alexandria	Town of Luray
Amherst County	City of Manassas
Arlington County	City of Manassas Park
City of Charlottesville	City of Norfolk
Clarke County	Orange County
City of Falls Church	City of Petersburg
Fairfax County	Prince William County
Floyd County	Stafford County
City of Hampton	Town of Vienna
City of Harrisonburg	Town of Wise
James City County	York County
Town of Leesburg	

Reference: [§46.2-906.1](#)

## Accidents

Bicyclists must stop when they are in an accident involving death, injury, or property damage. The bicyclist's name and address must be given to the police and to any person involved in the accident or the owner of the property. If unattended property is damaged, the bicyclist must make a reasonable effort to find the owner. The bicyclist's name and address must be given to the owner. If the owner cannot be located, the bicyclist must leave a note in a conspicuous place at the accident site and report the accident to the police within 24 hours.

Reference: [§§46.2-894,46.2-895,46.2-896](#)

## Important Note on Infractions

**Violation of state traffic laws is considered a traffic infraction and is punishable by a fine of not more than \$100 unless other specific penalty provisions apply.**

## Tips for Safe Bicycling

- Be a responsible bicyclist - obey all traffic control devices and use proper hand signals.
- Always ride with the flow of traffic.
- Dress safely - wear a helmet, wear bright colored clothing, and secure loose pant legs.
- Ride defensively - anticipate the actions of other road users and watch for road hazards.
- Pass vehicles with extreme care - turning vehicles may not see you.
- Be aware of motor vehicle blind spots whether while riding or when stopped at an intersection.
- Maximize your visibility at night - wear reflective clothing and apply reflective tape to your bicycle.
- Walk your bicycle when you get into traffic situations beyond your cycling abilities.
- Exercise great caution when riding in bus traffic - watch out for buses pulling to and from curbs and passengers getting on and off buses.
- Park your bicycle so you do not block sidewalks, handicap and building accesses, or emergency drives.
- Lock your bicycle - secure both wheels and the frame to a stationary object using a sturdy lock.
- Register or license your bicycle if required or provided by your community.

Source: <http://www.virginiadot.org/programs/bk-laws.asp>