Know Your

Pedestrian and Bicycle Laws

Whether we're walking, bicycling, or driving, we must share the roads, sidewalks, and trails with others.

Sharing the road safely is especially important for bicyclists and pedestrians, who are more vulnerable than motorists. In order to do so, we all need to understand the laws that govern walking, bicycling, and driving; these laws are found in the New York State Vehicle & Traffic Law. Following these laws makes us safer and shows respect for other users of the road. Walking, bicycling, and driving in a safe and respectful way will also garner greater respect from others, increasing safety for everyone.

LAWS FOR WHEN YOU'RE WALKING

CROSSING THE STREET

Obey all traffic signals, signs and pavement markings when you are crossing a street. [Section 1150, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Follow pedestrian signals when they are present [www.safeny.ny.gov/dot-ped.htm]

Walking person/Walk: Check for traffic and turning vehicles; begin crossing.

Steady Red Hand/Don't Walk: Do not start to cross. Wait for the next Walk.

Flashing Red Hand/Don't Walk: If you are already in the street, finish crossing. If you have not started crossing, wait for the next Walk. There may be a countdown timer that indicates how many seconds you have to complete the crossing.

When you are in a crosswalk where there isn't a traffic control signal, drivers must yield the right-of-way to you [Section 1151, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

At mid-block locations, if there isn't a crosswalk, sign, or signal, you must yield the right-of-way to all vehicles on the roadway [Section 1152, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. It is always safer to cross at an intersection.

WHERE TO WALK

Use sidewalks where they are provided and safe to use. When there are no sidewalks, walk on the left side of the roadway or shoulder, facing traffic [Section 1156-b, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. Stay as far to the left as possible.

Tip: See and Be Seen! Wear bright and/or reflective clothing, especially at night.

LAWS FOR WHEN YOU'RE BICYCLING

RIDING ON THE ROAD

You have the legal right to ride a bicycle on most public highways, except Interstate highways and certain expressways. When riding on the road, you have all of the rights and are subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle [Section 1231, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Therefore, you must obey all traffic signals, signs and pavement markings [Section 1230(a), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

WHERE TO RIDE

Always ride in the same direction as traffic [Section 1234(a), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. Riding with traffic makes you more visible and predictable to motorists.

If there is a usable bicycle lane, you must use it [Section 1234(a), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. If there is no bicycle lane or it is unusable due to parked cars or other hazards, you must ride on the right shoulder or near the right edge or curb of the roadway in a manner to avoid undue interference with other traffic, unless the lane is too narrow, you are turning left, or you need to move further left to avoid hazards such as parked cars or debris.

The presence of an off-road path does not preclude your right to ride in the roadway. In some cases, a roadway may be safer or more convenient than a path.

Riding a bicycle on a sidewalk is not prohibited by New York State law, but municipalities may pass ordinances prohibiting bicycling on sidewalks. Riding on sidewalks can cause conflicts or crashes with pedestrians and motorists because they are not looking for you on the sidewalk. Except for very young cyclists under parental supervision, bicycling on sidewalks is not recommended.

HELMETS

Helmets are required for everyone under 14 years old. Child passengers ages one through four must also ride in a child safety seat. Children under the age of one are prohibited from being transported on a bicycle [Section 1238(5), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. Certain localities in New York State have passed stricter local helmet ordinances (see http://www.helmets.org/mandator.htm).

Tip: Every bicyclist should wear an approved helmet to reduce the risk of sustaining a serious head injury. A helmet should fit squarely on top of the head in a level position and cover the top of the forehead extending down to an inch above the eyebrows. The helmet should not be able to slide back and forth on the head or rock from side to side.

BICYCLING WITH OTHERS

You may ride two abreast on roadways, but must ride single file when being overtaken by other vehicles or when passing vehicles, pedestrians or other bicyclists. You may only ride more than two abreast on a shoulder, lane or path intended for bicycling only if there is sufficient space [Section 1234(b), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

TURNING

Use the same through or turning lanes as motorists. When making a left turn, you may choose to dismount and use the crosswalk as a pedestrian. After crossing the intersection, move to a usable right-hand shoulder or to the right side of the right-hand lane.

Your position when preparing for a turn is governed by the turning rules that apply to other traffic [Section 1234(a), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. When preparing for a left turn, move to the center of the lane to prevent a following motorist from sharing the lane. If there is more than one left turn lane, use the one furthest to the right. After a left turn, move to the right as soon as it is safe to do so.

Use hand signals before you make a turn [Section 1237, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Tip: Establish eye contact with drivers and pedestrians before making a turn or changing lanes.

EQUIPMENT

A bicycle must be equipped with:

- A brake capable of making the tires skid on dry level pavement.
- A bell, horn or other audible device that can be heard at least a hundred feet away.
- A headlight and taillight, front and rear reflectors, spoke reflectors and pedal reflectors to be used when riding at night [Section 1236, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Tip: Warn others before you pass—use your bell and call out "on your left!"

SAFETY

Keep at least one hand on the handlebar at all times [Section 1235, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Never wear more than one earphone attached to an audio device [Section 375 (24-a), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Tip: See and Be Seen. Be visible and predictable! Wear bright or reflective clothing. Ride in a straight line. Do not weave in and out of traffic. Leave 3 feet between yourself and parked cars so you can avoid a door that opens unexpectedly.

The Bike Box is an intersection safety design to prevent bicycle/car collisions at the intersection

LAWS FOR WHEN YOU'RE DRIVING

CROSSWALKS

At a crosswalk without a traffic signal, you must yield to any pedestrians at the crosswalk, slowing down or stopping if needed. If a vehicle is stopped to permit a pedestrian to cross, do not overtake and pass the stopped vehicle [Section 1151, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

At crosswalks where there is a traffic signal, pedestrians have the right of way when crossing with the signal.

At intersections and crossings, stop at the painted stop or yield line (or if there isn't one, before the crosswalk)—keep the crosswalk clear for people to cross the street [Section 1172, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

ENTERING THE STREET

When entering or exiting a street from an alley, building, private road or driveway, stop before crossing the sidewalk and yield the right-of-way to pedestrians [Section 1173 and Section 1151-a, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

SHARING THE ROAD WITH BICYCLISTS

Bicyclists are fully entitled to use the road and have the right to "take the lane" by positioning themselves at or near the center of the lane when needed to avoid hazards or if the lane is too narrow to safely travel side by side with motorists [Section 1234(a), NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Pass bicycles only when necessary and safe: pass to the left of the bicycle at a safe distance until safely clear [Section 1122-a, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law]. When in doubt, wait until you can pass at a safe speed.

Before making a right turn, let bicyclists clear the intersection. When turning left or entering a roadway, yield to oncoming bicyclists as you would to any vehicle.

Tip: When parked on the street, check for bicyclists approaching from behind you before opening your car door.

SAFETY

Always exercise due care to avoid colliding with any person walking or bicycling [Section 1146, NYS Vehicle & Traffic Law].

Tip: Always be vigilant when pedestrians are present, especially those with visual or physical impairments.

RESOURCES & REFERENCES

PEDESTRIAN LAWS

http://www.safeny.ny.gov/peds-vt.htm

http://www.safeny.ny.gov/peds-ndx.htm

BICYCLING LAWS

http://www.safeny.ny.gov/bike-vt.htm

http://www.safeny.ny.gov/bike-ndx.htm

NEW YORK STATE VEHICLE & TRAFFIC LAW

http://public.leginfo.state.ny.us

NYSAMPO

New York State Association of Metropolitan Planning Organizations

http://www.nysmpos.org