

OHIO BIKE LAWS

Excerpted by the Ohio Bicycle Federation

Below are annotated excerpts of concern to cyclists from Ohio traffic law. The ***BOLD ITALICIZED COMMENTS*** are interpretations by members of the Ohio Bicycle Federation and are not part of the law. They are added to help clarify the law as written.

If you want to look-up Ohio traffic law for yourself, you can access the entire Ohio Revised Code online, <http://onlinedocs.andersonpublishing.com/revisedcode/>. The traffic laws are in Title 45. You can also go directly to [Chapter 4511](#) (the rules of the road) and [Chapter 4513](#) (equipment rules).

Information given here includes revisions to the Ohio Revised Code effective 15 Sep 2006.

§ 4501.01. Definitions.

As used in this chapter and Chapters 4503., 4505., 4507., 4509., 4511., 4513., 4515., and 4517. of the Revised Code, and in the penal laws, except as otherwise provided:

(A) "Vehicle" means every device, including a motorized bicycle, in, upon, or by which any person or property may be transported or drawn upon a highway, except that "vehicle" does not include any motorized wheelchair, any electric personal assistive mobility device, any device that is moved by power collected from overhead electric trolley wires or that is used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks, or any device, other than a bicycle, that is moved by human power.

Comment: A bicycle is defined as a vehicle and thus is governed by a uniform set of rules common to all vehicles and a small set of specific rules for bicycles. (There are other specific rules for other vehicle types, such as trucks or busses.) The annotated list here summarizes the most important parts of the traffic rules and equipment rules that govern bicycle driving. People who try to make up their own rules have an accident rate five times higher than knowledgeable cyclists who follow the rules of the road.

§ 4511.07. Local traffic regulations.

(A) Sections 4511.01 to 4511.78, 4511.99, and 4513.01 to 4513.37 of the Revised Code do not prevent local authorities from carrying out the following activities with respect to streets and highways under their jurisdiction and within the reasonable exercise of the police power:

(8) Regulating the operation of bicycles: provided that no such regulation shall be fundamentally inconsistent with the uniform rules of the road prescribed by this chapter and that no such regulation shall prohibit the use of bicycles on any public street or highway except as provided in section 4511.051 of the Revised Code;

(9) Requiring the registration and licensing of bicycles, including the requirement of a registration fee for residents of the local authority;

(B) No ordinance or regulation enacted under division (A)(4), (5), (6), (7), (8), or (10) of this section shall be effective until signs giving notice of the local traffic regulations are posted upon or at the entrance to the highway or part of the highway affected, as may be most appropriate.

Comment: The most important of the reforms passed in 2006 will require that any local regulations be consistent with the uniform rules of the road. In addition, signs are required of such local regulations. Unfortunately, there are still many ordinances inconsistent with uniform laws. Some of these bad ordinances mandate unsafe practices.

§ 4511.25. Lanes of travel upon roadways.

(A) Upon all roadways of sufficient width, a vehicle or trackless trolley shall be driven upon the right half of the roadway except as follows:

(1) When overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction, or when making a left turn under the rules governing such movements;

(2) When an obstruction exists making it necessary to drive to the left of the center of the highway; provided, any person so doing shall yield the right of way to all vehicles traveling in the proper direction upon the unobstructed portion of the highway within such distance as to constitute an immediate hazard;

(3) When driving upon a roadway divided into three or more marked lanes for traffic under the rules applicable thereon;

(4) When driving upon a roadway designated and posted with signs for one-way traffic;

(5) When otherwise directed by a police officer or traffic control device.

(B)(1) Upon all roadways any vehicle or trackless trolley proceeding at less than the prevailing and lawful speed of traffic at the time and place and under the conditions then existing shall be driven in the right-hand lane then available for traffic, and far enough to the right to allow passing by faster vehicles if such passing is safe and reasonable, except under any of the following circumstances:

(a) When overtaking and passing another vehicle or trackless trolley proceeding in the same direction:

(b) When preparing for a left turn;

(c) When the driver must necessarily drive in a lane other than the right-hand lane to continue on the driver's intended route.

(2) Nothing in division (B)(1) of this section requires a driver of a slower vehicle to compromise the driver's safety to allow overtaking by a faster vehicle.

Comment: Section 4511.25(A) is a general rule that applies to all vehicles, including bicycles. Some people think it is safer to ride on the left to "see traffic coming". This is illegal and wrong! Pedestrians walk facing traffic so they can sidestep off the road if necessary. But you cannot sidestep a bike. Riding on the left is both illegal and dangerous. Crash statistics show that wrong way riding has about 3½ times the risk as riding on the right. Section 4511.25(B) simply means that slower vehicles should not unnecessarily delay faster traffic. (See also § 4511.55 below.)

§ 4511.27. Rules governing overtaking and passing of vehicles.

The following rules govern the overtaking and passing of vehicles or trackless trolleys proceeding in the same direction:

(A) The operator of a vehicle or trackless trolley overtaking another vehicle or trackless trolley proceeding in the same direction shall ... pass to the left thereof at a safe distance, and shall not again drive to the right side of the roadway until safely clear of the overtaken vehicle or trackless trolley.

(B) Except when overtaking and passing on the right is permitted, the operator of an overtaken vehicle shall give way to the right in favor of the overtaking vehicle at the latter's audible signal, and he shall not increase the speed of his vehicle until completely passed by the overtaking vehicle.

Comment: Since cyclists usually ride near the right side of the road, beginners are tempted to pass slow or stopped traffic on the right, especially in a "bicycle lane" with a painted line. Passing on the right is often dangerous and, in many cases, illegal.

§4511.31. Hazardous zones

(A) The department of transportation may determine those portions of any state highway where overtaking and passing other traffic or driving to the left of the center or center line of the roadway would be especially hazardous and may, by appropriate signs or markings on the highway, indicate the beginning and end of such zones. ...

(B) Division (A) of this section does not apply when all of the following apply:

(1) The slower vehicle is proceeding at less than half the speed of the speed limit applicable to that location.

(2) The faster vehicle is capable of overtaking and passing the slower vehicle without exceeding the speed limit.

(3) There is sufficient clear sight distance to the left of the center or center line of the roadway to meet the overtaking and passing provisions of section 4511.29 of the Revised Code, considering the speed of the slower vehicle.

Comment: Section 4511.31(B) should help reduce tension between cyclists and faster drivers. Now, they can pass in "no passing" zones IF passing is safe.

§ 4511.36. Rules for turns at intersections.

The driver of a vehicle intending to turn at an intersection shall be governed by the following rules:

(A) Approach for a right turn and a right turn shall be made as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway.

(B) At any intersection where traffic is permitted to move in both directions on each roadway entering the intersection, an approach for a left turn shall be made in that portion of the right half of the roadway nearest the center line thereof and by passing to the right of such center line where it enters the intersection and after entering the intersection the left turn shall be made so as to leave the intersection to the right of the center line of the roadway being entered. Whenever practicable the left turn shall be made in that portion of the intersection to the left of the center of the intersection.

Comment: The rules for turns are exactly the same for bicycles as for other vehicles – merge to the appropriate position (right for right turns, left for left turns), yield to any traffic that has the right of way and then turn.

Getting into position for a left turn may involve merging across lanes of traffic. If traffic is heavy, you should start doing this early to take advantage of gaps in traffic. Otherwise, there may not be a gap when you need it. Beginners, who have not yet developed the skill to merge in traffic, may make pedestrian-style turns instead.

§ 4511.39. Turn and stop signals.

No person shall turn a vehicle or trackless trolley or move right or left upon a highway unless and until such person has exercised due care to ascertain that the movement can be made with reasonable safety nor without giving an appropriate signal in the manner hereinafter provided.

When required, a signal of intention to turn or move right or left shall be given continuously during not less than the last one hundred feet traveled by the vehicle or trackless trolley before turning, except that in the case of a person operating a bicycle, the signal shall be made not less than one time but is not required to be continuous. A bicycle operator is not required to make a signal if the bicycle is in a designated turn lane, and a signal shall not be given when the operator's hands are needed for the safe operation of the bicycle. ...

Comment: Never turn or change lanes without first yielding to any traffic that has the right of way, and give a signal if possible. However, skip the signal if your hand is needed for control or brakes.

§ 4511.40. Hand and arm signals.

(A) Except as provided in division (B) of this section, all signals required by sections 4511.01 to 4511.78 of the Revised Code, when given by hand and arm, shall be given from the left side of the vehicle in the following manner, and such signals shall indicate as follows:

- (1) Left turn, hand and arm extended horizontally;
- (2) Right turn, hand and arm extended upward;
- (3) Stop or decrease speed, hand and arm extended downward.

(B) As an alternative to division (A)(2) of this section, a person operating a bicycle may give a right turn signal by extending the right hand and arm horizontally and to the right side of the bicycle.

Comment: The right-arm turn signal described in (B) above is more easily understood.

§ 4511.52. Bicycles.

(A) Sections 4511.01 to 4511.78, 4511.99, and 4513.01 to 4513.37, of the Revised Code that are applicable to bicycles apply whenever a bicycle is operated upon any highway or upon any path set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles.

(B) Except as provided in division (D) of this section, a bicycle operator who violates any section of the Revised Code described in division (A) of this section that is applicable to bicycles may be issued a ticket, citation, or summons by a law enforcement officer for the violation in the same manner as the operator of a motor vehicle would be cited for the same violation. A person who commits any such violation while operating a bicycle shall not have any points assessed against the person's driver's license, commercial driver's license, temporary instruction permit, or probationary license under section

4510.036 of the Revised Code.

(C) Except as provided in division (D) of this section, in the case of a violation of any section of the Revised Code described in division (A) of this section by a bicycle operator or by a motor vehicle operator when the trier of fact finds that the violation by the motor vehicle operator endangered the lives of bicycle riders at the time of the violation, the court, notwithstanding any provision of the Revised Code to the contrary, may require the bicycle operator or motor vehicle operator to take and successfully complete a bicycling skills course approved by the court in addition to or in lieu of any penalty otherwise prescribed by the Revised Code for that violation.

Comment: 4511.52(A) Means that the standard traffic rules apply to bicycle drivers. These driving laws allow safe, fast and efficient travel. Riding on sidewalks or multi-use "bike paths" is moderately safe only if done at slow speeds and extremely carefully. Riding on paths is popular for recreation but provides only limited utility for transportation. Path riding is not covered in this digest. (B) Means that bicycle violators may be ticketed but will not have "points" assessed against any driver's license, except for a DWI offense. (C) allows judges to offer a cycling skills course to violators.

§ 4511.54. Prohibition against attaching bicycles and sleds to vehicles.

No person riding upon any bicycle, coaster, roller skates, sled, or toy vehicle shall attach the same or self to any streetcar, trackless trolley, or vehicle upon a roadway.

§ 4511.55. Riding bicycles; motorcycles abreast.

(A) Every person operating a bicycle upon a roadway shall ride as near to the right side of the roadway as practicable obeying all traffic rules applicable to vehicles and exercising due care when passing a standing vehicle or one proceeding in the same direction.

(B) Persons riding bicycles or motorcycles upon a roadway shall ride not more than two abreast in a single lane, except on paths or parts of roadways set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles or motorcycles.

(C) This section does not require a person operating a bicycle to ride at the edge of the roadway when it is unreasonable or unsafe to do so. Conditions that may require riding away from the edge of the roadway include when necessary to avoid fixed or moving objects, parked or moving vehicles, surface hazards, or if it otherwise is unsafe or impracticable to do so, including if the lane is too narrow for the bicycle and an overtaking vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane.

Comment: Section 4511.55(A) is very often misquoted to say that cyclists are required to ride as near as possible to the curb. The new paragraph (C) should help reduce this confusion. There are many conditions where it is much safer to ride near the middle of the lane. It is not practicable (practice-able) to ride on the far right when passing or turning left; or when avoiding objects, parked cars, moving vehicles, pedestrians, animals, surface or other hazards; or when the travel lane is too narrow for a bicycle and another vehicle to pass safely side by side within the lane.

Many motorists are reluctant to cross a lane line when passing a bicycle. A cyclist who "hugs the curb" unintentionally invites motorists to pass with unsafe clearance. Riding near the middle of a narrow lane sends the message that passing traffic must use the next lane.

The real purpose of this law is to prevent unnecessary delay to faster traffic. Since the law cannot require unsafe operation, the phrase as close as practicable is highly flexible, varying widely according to conditions. Positions well away from the edge of the road can be in compliance.

Section 4511.55(B) allows riding two abreast. However, cyclists should avoid unnecessary delay to other traffic. Please be courteous and "single up" when other drivers wish to pass if such passing is safe and reasonable. There is no violation if any of the following apply: (1) If there is no traffic being delayed; (2) If the cyclists are traveling as fast as other traffic; (3) If traffic can reasonably pass by using another lane; (4) If the lane is too narrow or it is otherwise unsafe for passing.

§ 4511.56. Signal devices on bicycle.

(A) Every bicycle when in use at the times specified in section 4513.03 of the Revised Code, shall be equipped with the following:

(1) A lamp mounted on the front of either the bicycle or the operator that shall emit a white light visible from a distance of at least five hundred feet to the front and three hundred feet to the sides. A generator-powered lamp that emits light only when the bicycle is moving may be used to meet this requirement.

(2) A red reflector on the rear that shall be visible from all distances from one hundred feet to six hundred feet to the rear when directly in front of lawful lower beams of head lamps on a motor vehicle;

(3) A lamp emitting either flashing or steady red light visible from a distance of five hundred feet to the rear shall be used in addition to the red reflector. If the red lamp performs as a reflector in that it is visible as specified in division (A)(2) of this section, the red lamp may serve as the reflector and a separate reflector is not required.

(B) Additional lamps and reflectors may be used in addition to those required under division (A) of this section, except that red lamps and red reflectors shall not be used on the front of the bicycle and white lamps and white reflectors shall not be used on the rear of the bicycle.

(C) A bicycle may be equipped with a device capable of giving an audible signal, except that a bicycle shall not be equipped with nor shall any person use upon a bicycle any siren or whistle.

(D) Every bicycle shall be equipped with an adequate brake when used on a street or highway.

Comment: An unseen cyclist is in great danger. About 30 percent of serious cycling causalities occur at night although only about four percent of cycling is done then. The reflectors that come with new bikes are grossly inadequate for nighttime visibility. Always use both a headlight and taillight when you ride in the dark.

§ 4511.711. Driving upon sidewalk area.

No person shall drive any vehicle, other than a bicycle, upon a sidewalk or sidewalk area except upon a permanent or duly authorized temporary driveway.

Nothing in this section shall be construed as prohibiting local authorities from regulating the operation of bicycles within their respective jurisdictions, except that no local authority may require that bicycles be operated on sidewalks.

Comment: Although this section allows riding on sidewalks, don't do it. Accident studies show that even low-speed sidewalk riding has about double the accident rate as riding on the road. The danger increases with speed. If you ride on the sidewalk, every intersection and even every driveway is a potential collision site. Motorists crossing your path do not look for conflicting traffic on the sidewalk, especially if you are coming from the "wrong way".