

Lane Use and Cyclist Safety Information for Idaho Law Enforcement



It may not look right because you don't see it very often, but this is legal and is the safest position when driving a bicycle in a narrow lane

But don't cyclists have to ride as far right as practicable?

49-717(1)(c) states that a cyclist does NOT have to stay right *when reasonably necessary to avoid conditions including fixed or moving objects, parked or moving vehicles, bicycles, pedestrians, animals, surface hazards or **substandard width lanes** that make it unsafe to continue along the right-hand curb or edge.* A substandard-width lane is defined in 49-120(30) as *a lane that is too narrow for a bicycle and another vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane.* The Idaho Department of Transportation follows national guidelines set out by the American Association of State Highway Transportation Officials (AASHTO) specifying 14 ft as the minimum lane width which allows safe side-by-side sharing of bicycles and most motor vehicles. (See diagram on second page.)

The lane pictured to the left is 13 ft wide. Many lanes in Idaho are only 10-12 ft wide. Bicycle drivers are not required to keep right in such narrow lanes, and are encouraged, for their safety, to occupy enough lane that motorists recognize they must change lanes to safely pass. By riding this way, cyclists can avoid road hazards, operate more predictably, encourage overtaking motorists to pass safely and discourage common motorist mistakes that result in crashes.

What about traffic flow?

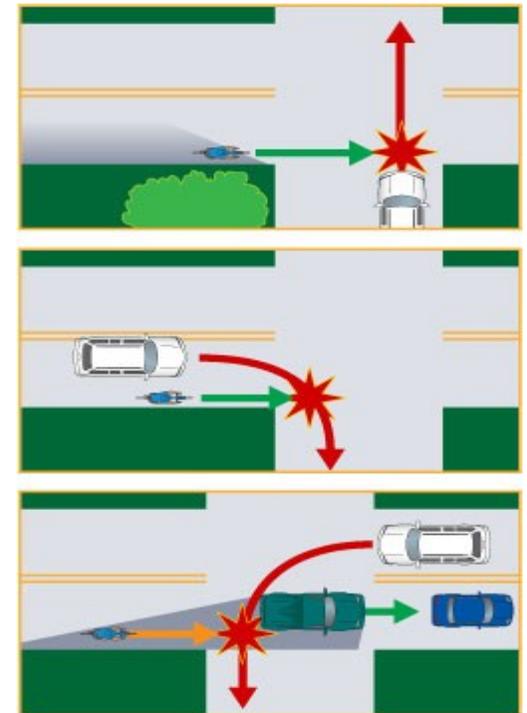
It is rare for a bicycle driver to cause a significant disruption in traffic flow. It's important to recognize the many causes of delay and congestion on the road. Traffic lights cause tightly-packed platoons of cars. If a cyclist is unfortunate enough to be stopped near the front of the platoon at a red light, it may take a few seconds for traffic to shuffle around him after the light changes. Most likely, all of those cars will be stopping again at the next red light. Bicycles are as normal and necessary a part of the traffic mix as city buses, school buses, garbage trucks, freight trains and traffic lights. In Idaho there are on average over 100 motor vehicles for each bicycle on the road, so cyclists can hardly be blamed as a significant source of traffic congestion.

This is an important safety issue!

A significant contributor in crashes between cars and bikes is poor lane positioning by the cyclist, as shown in the diagrams to the right. Riding too far right makes the cyclist hard to see and encourages motorists to squeeze past—dangerously close—in narrow lanes. In an effort to increase cycling safety and decrease crashes between bikes and cars, cycling educators are teaching cyclists to ride assertively on our roads.

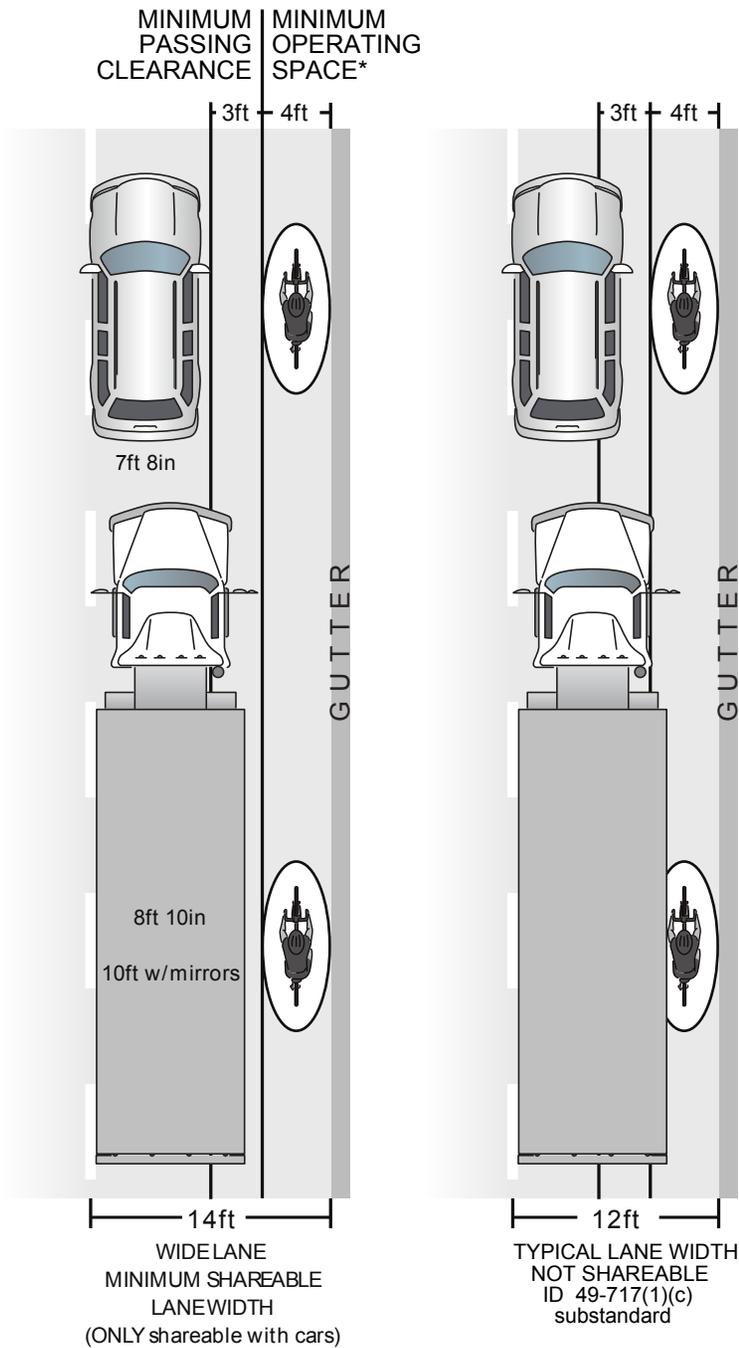
They need our help

If you see a cyclist riding in the middle of the lane, it is likely that cyclist is educated about the law and how to ride safely. If a motorist complains about a cyclist riding assertively, take the opportunity to educate that motorist. Making our roads safer and more hospitable to bicycle drivers will make our community healthier and more livable.

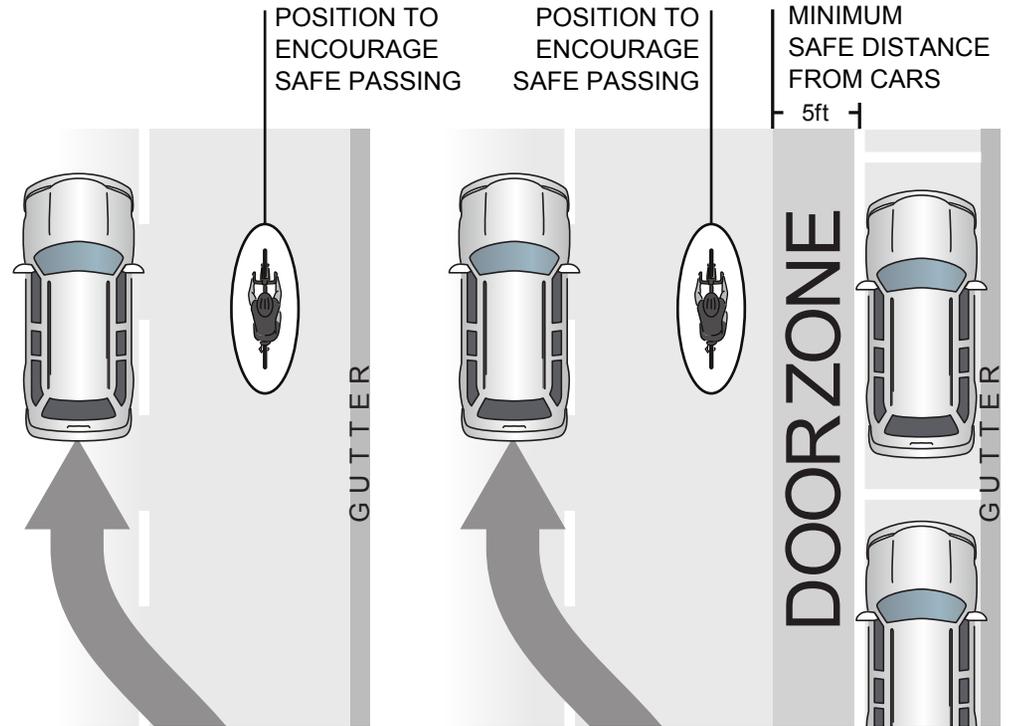


Three common bike-car crashes that can be prevented by riding farther left

LANE WIDTH & CYCLIST SAFETY



* Operating space as defined by AASHTO



SAFE AND LEGAL POSITION in a 12ft lane

ONSTREET PARKING
The lane may look wide, but 5 feet of it is not usable.

Cyclists are Drivers

- Bicycle drivers have the same rights and responsibilities as other drivers.
- Bicycle drivers must operate with the flow of traffic and obey traffic control devices.
- 49-717(1)(c) applies to MANY roads in Idaho — A cyclist is entitled to the full lane when the lane is “substandard” [not wide enough to share, as defined in 49-120(30)].
- 49-644 requires cyclists to execute left turns from the same roadway positions as other drivers, including the use of special left-turn lanes.
- 49-655 Minimum speed regulation only applies to drivers of MOTOR vehicles.
- 49-718 Riding two abreast only creates an unnecessary impediment if the lane is wide enough to share with a car driver when single file. If the lane is substandard, a single bicycle driver is entitled to the full lane, so a second bicycle driver creates no additional impact.
- Cyclists are NOT required to ride in any place that would jeopardize their safety; this includes, but is not limited to, the door zone of parked cars, hazardous pavement, safety zones, areas with poor sight-lines for crossing traffic, and a part of the lane that would invite motorists to squeeze past them.
- Although cyclists may choose to ride on shoulders, they are not legally required to do so since shoulders are NOT part of the roadway [49-119(19)]. Likewise, cyclists are required to obey traffic control devices (49-801), so there is no legal requirement for cyclists to travel in empty parking spaces.

Original text and images designed by the Orlando Police Department and FLbikelaw.org. Modifications for Idaho statutes by Richard M. Eckman