

## **Bike Law Update**

Yes, it's true: the Bicyclist Safety Bill is law after 8 years and 4 legislative sessions — perseverance and grassroots support paid off in the end! MassBike played a central role throughout the history of the bill, from drafting the language, to lobbying for its passage, to the successful 2006 effort that ended in a veto, and now to a law! MassBike thanks our many supporters in the House and Senate for their persistence, and thanks Governor Patrick for recognizing that this law will help make Massachusetts a healthier, greener, more sustainable state.

This is a great victory for cyclists, and it was a true team effort, ranging from MassBike to legislators to you, our members and supporters. Without all your calls, emails, and letters to legislators and governors over the years, this could not have happened. You let the politicians know that bicyclist safety is an important issue, and they heard the message! So thanks to all of you.

Among the many changes the new law makes, it adds police training on bicycle law and dangerous behavior by bicyclists and motorists; explains how a motorist should safely pass a bicycle; explains how a motorist should safely make a turn in front of a bicycle; makes “dooring” (opening a car door into the path of a bicycle or other vehicle) subject to ticket and fine; permits bicyclists to ride two abreast when it does not impede cars from passing; and adds legal protections for bicyclists who choose to ride to the right of other traffic. [Click here for the full text of the new law.](#)

Governor Patrick signed the Bicyclist Safety Bill into law on January 15, 2009. The new law is in effect immediately; however, the police education and enforcement provisions will take some time to implement.

### **Changes for Bicyclists**

1. Safer Signaling : Bicyclists were already required to use hand signals when stopping or turning, but now it is clear that you are not required to signal when you need both hands on the handlebars, such as when operating the brakes, shifters, or steering.
2. Riding Two Abreast Permitted : Bicyclists are no longer restricted to riding single file at all times. You can now ride two abreast (two bicycles, side-by-side), except that you still have to help faster vehicles to pass. So stay in single file when cars need to get by! On multi-lane roads, you can ride two abreast, but all the cyclists in your group must stay in one lane (which will usually be the right-hand lane unless you are making a left turn).

### **Changes for Motorists**

3. Don't “Door” Bicyclists : Motorists (and their passengers) can now be ticketed and fined up to \$100 for opening car or truck doors into the path of any other traffic, including bicycles and pedestrians. “Dooring” is a frequent cause of bicycle crashes and bicyclist injuries, and while motorists could already be sued in civil court or charged in criminal court under certain circumstances, they could not previously be ticketed and fined on the spot by a police officer.
4. Don't Cut Off Bicyclists After Passing : Motorists used to be required only to stay a safe distance to the left of a bicyclist (or any other vehicle) when passing; now, motorists are also prohibited from returning to the right until safety clear of the bicyclist.

5. Don't Squeeze Bicyclists in Narrow Lanes : If the lane is too narrow for a motorist to pass a bicycle (or any other vehicle) at a safe distance while staying in the lane, the motorist must use another lane to pass, or, if that is also unsafe, the motorist must wait until it is safe to pass.

6. Don't "Right-Hook" Bicyclists : A "right-hook" is when a motorist makes an abrupt right turn too close to a bicyclist, causing the cyclist to crash or make an emergency maneuver to avoid crashing. Motorists are now prohibited from making abrupt right turns at intersections and driveways after passing a cyclist.

7. Yield to All Bicycles Before Turning Left : Motorists are already required to yield to oncoming vehicles (including bicycles) before turning left. The law now expressly includes yielding to bicyclists riding to the right of other traffic (e.g., on the shoulder), where they are legally permitted but may be more difficult for motorists to see.

8. Motorists Liable for Hitting Bicyclists Riding to the Right : Bicycles, unlike other vehicles, are permitted to ride to the right of other traffic (e.g., on the shoulder), and motorists are not permitted to use this fact as a legal defense for causing a crash with a bicyclist.

### **Changes for Bicycle Rental Businesses**

9. Helmet Availability : Bicycle rental businesses are now required to make helmets available to renters. The renters can still choose not to wear a helmet (except for children 16 and under who must wear helmets in Massachusetts), as long as a helmet is available if they want one.

### **Police Training and Enforcement**

10. Police Training : Police recruits are now required to receive training on the bicycle-related laws, bicyclist injuries, dangerous behavior by bicyclists, motorists actions that cause bicycle crashes, and motorists intentionally endangering bicyclists. The training is optional for in-service training of experienced officers. MassBike has developed a police training curriculum, which will be revised to reflect the new law, and we will work with the police to determine how to proceed with the training.

11. Enforcement : Under the old law, each city or town that wanted to write tickets to bicyclists for violating traffic laws had to create its own procedure, unlike the procedure for ticketing motorists, which is the same throughout the state. Very few communities implemented this cumbersome separate process. The new law eliminates the separate procedure for bicyclists, and intends that the existing procedure for motor vehicles be used for bicyclists as well. MassBike will work with the state to determine how to proceed with enforcement.

### **Other Changes**

12. Bicycle Registration Repealed : The bicycle registration law permitted any city or town to require residents to register their bicycles, to require bicycle rental businesses to register their bicycle fleets, and to require bicycle shops to file reports identifying the purchaser of every bicycle. The registration law was not being used or enforced anywhere in the state.

13. Safety Standard for Helmets : The acceptable standard for bicycle helmets is changed to refer to the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission.

- See more at: <http://massbike.org/resourcesnew/bike-law/bike-law-update/#sthash.lhQykQsm.dpuf>