



Drivers and cyclists deserve mutual respect

Frank Hayes
Special to The Lake Report



Frank Hayes is an avid cyclist. FILE/RICHARD HARLEY

I'd like to respond to Kip Voegel's commentary, "Lawyer's letter on cyclists not justified," (May 4).

I don't want to create a bun fight in the media but rather try to remind everyone that under the rules of the road, cyclists have some rights – and responsibilities.

Most drivers barely know the full rules of the road, as they pertain to drivers. But even fewer drivers are fully aware of the rules as they pertain to cyclists.

Let's start with some basics: the roads are a common transportation system for all users, to use in accordance with the law.

Cyclists are allowed to ride one metre from the edge of the road and drivers are legally obliged to give them an additional one metre of space when passing. That is over six feet in imperial terms.

Yes, that does mean that in most cases, a driver has to cross the centre line in order to pass a cyclist safely and legally.

If you can't, you slow down and wait until it is safe to pass. Think of cyclists as a slow-moving farm vehicle, at 25 km/h.

Do drivers wave wildly at them? Do they blast their horns in frustration at them? No, they wait until it is safe to pass on the other side of the road.

It is not illegal to ride two abreast but Niagara Regional Police suggest caution.

"There are roadways where two abreast may not be the best option (e.g. curves, hills, narrow or congested roads, darker areas). In other areas, like some of our long, flat rural roads with better visibility and sight lines, two abreast may work very well," Const. Phil Gavin says.

"Riding a bicycle at the right side of the roadway, requires everyone involved to be alert, cautious and courteous," he added.

"Whether single file or two abreast on a bike, or in a car, if you are traveling below the posted speed limit and impeding traffic flow you should be moving to the right side of the road way where practicable to

allow for the normal speed of traffic to safely pass," Gavin said.

Some police departments, notably Ottawa's, actually encourage cyclists riding side by side as it forces drivers to make a safer, wider pass.

From a cyclists' perspective, the reasons are very sound and logical. But from a driver's perspective, they just look at cyclists blocking the road.

Yes, they will ride two abreast to occupy a bigger space to protect themselves if they see a scene approaching where they need to ensure that a driver will not overtake them.

I know it is frustrating for a driver, but the cyclist is doing this for their own protection. The driver needs to think again of the cyclists as that slow-moving farm vehicle.

Blaring a horn will only ensure a negative response. A brief beep is adequate to notify them of your presence.

It is the same when cyclists approach a roundabout, even riding single file, cyclists are encouraged to occupy the middle of the lane. Yes, the middle of the lane, on the approach, through the roundabout, and all the way out of the exit.

Why? Because cyclists are supposed to ride one metre from the edge and drivers are legally obliged to give them an additional one metre for safe passing. This means that it is not possible to legally overtake a cyclist in a roundabout.

Cyclists are regarded as vehicles on the roads, with the same rights as drivers. Some people say, "Why don't you use the cycle path on the Niagara Park-

way?" But it is not a cycle path, it is a multi-use path, for walkers, joggers, parents with kids, etc.

And there is a speed limit on a multi-use path – 18 km/h. Most club riders ride well above this speed and riding on the multi-use path is great for drivers because we are simply "out of your way."

However, it is definitely not safe for all the other path users. As for cyclists running red lights and stop signs, I too have seen this and I would never condone it. When a cyclist does this, they are only endangering themselves.

But when a driver runs a stop sign or a red light, the untold damage they do changes people's lives, injures, kills, damages, etc. Last time I checked, the number of drivers killed by cyclists is zero.

As for cyclists dying on our roads, 74 annually in Canada is the average. Think about that: your child, your grandchild, your spouse killed while cycling, in an altercation with a vehicle.

From a traffic perspective, if all cyclists got off their bikes and into cars, think of the pollution and traffic congestion. The quaint groups of a dozen cyclists hopping from winery to winery would now be groups of a dozen cars.

Meanwhile, we are killing our planet, sooner rather than later. We sadly live in a car-centric world.

The Netherlands is the prime example of a country with full infrastructure for cycling. People there don't wear helmets. Cyclists don't get killed. Because there's only a need for protective gear when we move amid traffic.

Until such time as we improve our road infrastructure (which won't be soon), the laws are written to encourage safe shared use of a common transportation system. I also drive about 40,000 kilometres a year.

And I see bad cycling behaviour, the same as I see bad driving behaviour. We will never have a cop on every corner to catch offenders. So it is up to each of us to drive/ride safely, to accommodate those around us.

My main advice is to be cautious, patient, slow down when appropriate and give the minimum legal space. When cycling alone, I have had my share of "punishment passes," where a driver just about shaves the hairs off my left leg as they pass by, at speed, and the other side of the road is totally empty.

If I were caught by a sudden gust of wind or if I weave to avoid a pothole, tree branch, dead raccoon, etc. then I am as good as dead.

The driver would simply say I weaved in front of them and I would be another statistic, making the annual average 75 instead of 74.

All I ask is please, be considerate. As I said, I don't want to start a bun fight in the media but I do believe driver education and cyclist education are both important.

In my cycling club we hold an annual refresher course. Do drivers do any such thing? Unfortunately some drivers think it's a right to hold a licence, instead it is a privilege.

To Kip, I am totally open to meeting up for a coffee to talk through any number of scenarios you can mention, in the hope that I can give you a cyclist's perspective.

And I may learn something about a driver's perspective too. I ride more than 10,000 kilometres a year on these roads and I haven't hit or been hit – yet. And I'd like to keep it that way folks.

Thank you to all you safe and considerate drivers out there, you know who you are.

Frank Hayes lives in St. Davids.



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