

THE RULES OF THE ROAD FOR MICHIGAN CYCLISTS

Most of the laws that apply to the operation of bicycles on Michigan roads, sidewalks, and pathways are contained in the Michigan Vehicle Code. However, local ordinances also regulate the use of bicycles. This handbook will focus on the Michigan Vehicle Code, since it applies throughout the State and has been adopted by most municipalities.

A violation of a provision of the Michigan Vehicle Code is a civil infraction, which is a non-criminal violation of law which typically results in punishment in the form of a fine.

The Michigan Vehicle Code defines a bicycle as “*a device propelled by human power upon which a person may ride, having either 2 or 3 wheels in a tandem or tricycle arrangement, all of which are over 14 inches in diameter.*” A vehicle is defined as “*every device in, upon, or by which any person or property is or may be transported or drawn upon a highway, except devices exclusively moved by human power or used exclusively upon stationary rails or tracks.*” Accordingly, a bicycle is not considered a “*vehicle*” under Michigan law.

First and foremost, it must be understood that **cyclists have an absolute right to use public roads**. The Michigan Vehicle Code clearly states that each person riding a bicycle upon a roadway has all the rights and is subject to all the duties applicable to the driver of a motor vehicle. (MCL 257.657) However, when using the roads, a cyclist is also required to follow certain laws intended to ensure that cyclists use reasonable caution and safe cycling practices. These laws include the following provisions:

RIDE REASONABLY CLOSE TO THE RIGHT CURB

If riding below the posted speed limit, a cyclist is required to ride as close as practicable to the right hand curb or edge of the road. (MCL 257.660a) However, this statute recognizes five exceptions or situations where a cyclist need not ride as close to the right hand curb or edge of the road as practicable:

- When passing another bicycle or a vehicle proceeding in the same direction.
- When preparing to turn left.
- When conditions make the right hand edge of the roadway unsafe or unusable for bicycle users, including, but not limited to:



- Surface hazards (i.e., ruts in the pavement or potholes);
 - An uneven roadway surface;
 - Drain openings;
 - Debris;
 - Parked or moving vehicles or bicycles;
 - Pedestrians;
 - Animals;
 - Other obstacles; or
 - The lane is too narrow to permit a vehicle to safely overtake and pass a bicycle.
- When operating a bicycle in a lane in which traffic is turning right, but the cyclist intends to proceed straight through the intersection; and
 - When riding on a one-way highway or street that has two or more lanes. In this situation, the cyclist may also ride as close to the left curb or edge of the roadway as practicable.

RIDING TWO ABREAST

Cyclists must not ride more than two bicycles abreast. (MCL 257.660b)

LIGHTS

If riding one-half hour after sunset, or one-half hour before sunrise, a cyclist must use lights. The law requires that a light system for bicycles must, at a minimum, include a white light which is visible from 500 feet to the front and a red reflector on the rear which is visible from all distances from 100 feet to 600 feet when directly in front of lawful low beam headlights. A lamp emitting a red light visible from a distance of 500 feet may be used in addition to the red reflector. [MCL 257.662(1)]

HAND SIGNALS

A cyclist is required to signal:

- A left turn by extending his/her left hand and arm horizontally.
- A right turn by extending his/her left hand and arm upward, or by extending his/her right hand and arm horizontally.
- A stop or decrease in speed by extending his/her hand and arm downward. (MCL 257.648)

BRAKES

A bicycle must be equipped with a brake which enables the operator to make the braked wheels skid on dry, level, clean pavement. [MCL 257.662(2)]

CARRYING PACKAGES

A cyclist may not carry any package that prevents him/her from keeping both hands on the handlebars. (MCL 257.661)

PARKING

A bicycle may be parked on a sidewalk, except in places where it is prohibited by an official traffic control device. However, a bicycle may not be parked on a sidewalk in a manner that impedes the lawful movement of pedestrians or other traffic. Likewise, a bicycle may be parked on a highway or street in any location where parking is allowed

for motor vehicles, may park at any angle to the curb or edge of the highway, and may park abreast of another bicycle. However, a bicycle may not be parked on a highway or street in a manner that obstructs the movement of a legally parked motor vehicle. Further, local ordinances may limit the location and manner of bicycle parking. (MCL 257.660d)

RIDING BICYCLES ON SIDEWALKS

Bicycles may be ridden upon a sidewalk, but cyclists must yield the right-of-way to pedestrians and are required to give an audible signal before overtaking and passing a pedestrian. Further, official traffic control devices or local ordinances may restrict bicycles on sidewalks in some areas. Additionally, a cyclist lawfully operating a bicycle upon a sidewalk or a pedestrian crosswalk has all of the rights and responsibilities applicable to pedestrians using that sidewalk or crosswalk. (MCL 257.660c)

RIDING DOUBLE

A bicycle may not be used to carry more people than the bicycle is designed and equipped to carry. (MCL 257.658) In other words, riding “*double*” is prohibited.

RIDING WHILE ATTACHED TO A VEHICLE

A cyclist may not attach himself/herself or his/her bicycle to a street car or a vehicle upon a roadway. (MCL 257.659)

LIMITED ACCESS HIGHWAY

A cyclist may not ride on a limited access highway. A limited access highway is defined as “*every highway, street, or roadway in respect to which owners or occupants of abutting lands and other persons have no legal right of access to or from the same except at such points only, and in such manner as may be determined by the public authority having jurisdiction over such highway, street, or roadway.*” (MCL 257.26)



HELMETS AND CELL PHONES

There is no law that requires Michigan cyclists to wear helmets or prevents them from talking on cell phones while riding. However, it is obviously safe practice to wear a helmet and avoid cell phone use while riding a bicycle.

LOCAL ORDINANCES

As mentioned earlier, the laws that apply to cyclists are contained in the Michigan Vehicle Code and local ordinances. The Michigan Vehicle Code specifically states that local authorities may regulate the operation of bicycles. However, an ordinance or regulation enacted by a local authority shall not be enforceable unless signs that give notice of the local traffic regulations are posted upon or at the entrance to the highway, street, or area affected. [MCL 257.606]