

MARBLEHEAD REPORTER

CYCLE SENSE: Think ahead

Thomas Regan

Published 11:00 a.m. ET Jul. 23, 2020

According to a recent survey of about one hundred bicyclists in Marblehead, 80% identify themselves as recreational riders. Getting some exercise and fresh air, an opportunity for the family to be together, perhaps a trip to the store; there are many things that motivate us to be on our bicycles. Most of the time, we get on our bikes and go. Sometimes we consider factors such as whether the route is safe and age-appropriate for everyone riding, the latest forecast for those afternoon thunderstorms, or whether there be enough daylight to complete the trip. In fact, all bicyclists do plan, observe and evaluate before and during a ride. Often, this happens subconsciously especially as riders gain more experience. The smarter cyclist thinks ahead, stays more aware of his surroundings and anticipates things that will or could occur, sometimes unexpectedly, during his ride.

As relaxing as a bicycle ride can be, it is an active rather than a passive activity. Bicyclists must pay attention to their surroundings and anticipate what drivers, pedestrians and other bicyclists will do next. The busier the street, the more attention required. Cyclists can be overlooked by other drivers. It is particularly important to watch for turning vehicles; making eye contact with drivers of vehicles poised to turn and riding defensively are good safety habits to practice. When riding past parked cars, it is important to be aware of and ride outside of the “door zone,” which usually extends 3 to 4 feet from the side of the vehicle. On narrower streets, it may be necessary to “take the lane” and move to the center of the traffic lane in order to do this. In New England towns, potholes are a way of life. Bicyclists must keep an eye out for them, sewer grates, debris and other road hazards. Hitting them unexpectedly can cause quite a jolt or even a crash. For more, see this series of short biker/driver safety videos produced by Sustainable Marblehead featuring local high school students: <https://sustainablemarblehead.org/videos>.

Turning in general and especially at intersections requires more attention and actions both ahead of and during the turn. The most important aspect of riding through intersections is the cyclist’s position on the road. The general rule is that the cyclist should be in the right-

most lane or right side of the lane in the direction she wants to go. For left turns, the cyclist should be in the left lane or left side of the lane and should move to that position in a safe manner well ahead of the intersection by scanning and signaling prior to changing lanes. Another thing the cyclist should think about ahead of time is reduced visibility caused by weather or by riding close to dawn, dusk or nighttime. Wearing bright, reflective clothing and using front and rear lights may be appropriate. Too often, bicyclists start riding without considering all of their choices. As creatures of habit, we tend to repeat favorite things including travel routes. But what may be easy or necessary for an automobile trip may not be the best choice on the bicycle. With a little forethought, the bicycle trip can avoid the busy streets and intersections and be replaced by a quieter, more scenic ride on a parallel path or even a ride through the woods on the Rail Trail.

This is the sixth in a series of articles about bicycling and bicycle safety. The author is affiliated with Sustainable Marblehead (<http://sustainablemarblehead.org>), BIKE Marblehead, MassBike (<http://massbike.org>), and is a League of American Bicyclists certified instructor (<http://bikeleague.org>). Source material from LAB appears in this article.