

Cycle Sense

What's New

Regular followers of 'Cycle Sense' have learned a range of bicycle safety concepts and specific recommendations during the past three months. Some readers may be wondering about topics not included like riding techniques, gear shifting and hazard avoidance maneuvers. These and other bicycle handling skills are best taught with in-person, on-bike instruction. Generally, safety and skill instruction for younger children are offered at bike rodeos featuring many different age-appropriate on-bike activities. Instruction for older children and adults includes a combination of classroom and on-bike handling and skill lessons. Both rodeos and adult classes are usually sponsored by local bicycle organizations, like Bike Marblehead and the Beverly Bike Committee, and held in the community. As it becomes safer to gather again, classes will resume and be announced.

Since March, when Covid related Stay-at-Home directives began, the visibility of bicycling and bicycles has been on the rise. Bicycle shops doing repairs were deemed essential businesses, new bike sales increased sharply and it became difficult to schedule needed repairs. As the weather warmed, usually popular routes and trails became crowded. With a new spotlight on the sport, a number of things have stood out; here are some I have noticed. There seems to be a greater variety of bikes on the roads and trails. In addition to the most common ones; skinny tire road bikes; fat, knobby tire mountain bikes, and hybrid models in between these two; other styles like the comfortable and often colorful cruiser bicycle, and balloon tire fat bikes are more noticeable. And a different category, electric bicycles or E-bikes, is quickly gaining popularity. E-bikes are unlikely to replace standard bicycles but they appeal to a wide range of users, both traditional bicycle riders and others, and have gained traction in the marketplace. The battery power assist of E-bikes gives regular bike riders a boost—a combination of more speed and range while still getting exercise. Other users look to them as a practical alternative to driving their car. Considering that up to half of all driving trips are less than ten miles, it makes good sense. Global sales last year were \$15.4 Billion; every major bike manufacturer and an auto-maker have E-bike models. Entry level pricing is \$1500 and up. Battery range currently is 35 to 100 miles and improving.

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Bicyclists and drivers traveling out of town through Salem and Beverly lately may have noticed changes to roadways to make biking safer and more convenient. Both communities have been active, adding new bicycling infrastructure to more clearly indicate areas on roadways for bicycle use. Most common are separate bike lanes along the side of the street and ‘sharrow’ (shared arrow) markings on the road that indicate bikes and autos share the lane equally. A more unusual feature, green-colored bike boxes painted on the pavement, appear at a few of the busier intersections in Salem to facilitate bicycles turning either direction onto a crossing street. Plans for cycling infrastructure like this in Marblehead are included in the Town’s Complete Streets project listing but prioritized below construction of the new Rail Trail design. View a short League video of Bicycle Lanes here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3oJXqHdLJ2k>



Examples of new bicycle infrastructure in Salem—a Two-Way Protected Bike Lane on Derby St. and a Bike Box at an intersection on Lafayette St.

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Everyone is familiar with the Marblehead Rail Trail and many are aware of current plans by the town for its redesign and new construction. Fewer people understand how our Rail Trail fits into the larger patchwork of trails in surrounding communities and beyond. On the greater North Shore, efforts like ours have been duplicated in many cities and towns. Danvers, Peabody, Salem, Swampscott, and Topsfield all have bike paths on former rail lines. In the Newburyport area, they and neighboring towns Newbury, Amesbury and Salisbury formed the Coastal Trails Coalition to develop a trail network to serve their communities. These and other individual town efforts will eventually be combined with the Northern Strand Trail, running from Nahant Beach to Everett, to form a continuous (New Hampshire) Border to Boston route. Seemingly independent, these efforts were created to enhance each local community but have the added benefit of connecting them to each other.

This is the eighth in a series of articles about bicycling and bicycle safety. The author is affiliated with Sustainable Marblehead (www.sustainablemarblehead.org), BIKE Marblehead, MASS Bike (www.massbike.org), and is a League of American Bicyclists (LAB) Certified Instructor (www.bikeleague.org). Source material from LAB appears in this article.

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