

Roanoke Traffic Safety Campaign 2023: Change Lanes to Pass

Key Messages & Talking Points

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- Passing a bicyclist too closely is not just scary, it can result in life-altering crashes and even death.
- Drivers changing lanes to safely pass bicyclists is safer and more comfortable for everyone. Changing lanes to pass leads to fewer crashes, deaths, and injuries.
- The City of Roanoke received a Virginia Department of Motor Vehicle grant to create a citywide bicycle safety campaign.
- The campaign is running from June 12 to July 21, 2023, to increase awareness of the Virginia state law requiring drivers to change lanes when passing, and also to give 3 feet minimum when passing.

What are the 3 feet & passing laws?

- Virginia law states that drivers passing bicyclists traveling in the same direction must allow a minimum of 3 feet of space between their vehicle and the bicyclist.
- If the travel lane is not wide enough to allow this, the driver must change lanes. Drivers can cross a double yellow line in order to give a bicyclist at least 3 feet of space when passing. VA Code 46.2-839. VA Code 46.2-804.
- Once passed, the driver shall return to the right side of the road only once clear of the bicycle. VA Code 46.2-839.

How is the campaign increasing awareness of these laws?

- The Change Lanes to Pass campaign includes a mix of campaign activities including paid, donated, and earned media to raise awareness of the campaign.
- The campaign also includes community engagement activities intended to deepen community members' involvement in the campaign and help the campaign reach more people.

How long will the campaign last?

- The campaign will last 6 weeks, starting June 12, 2023, and ending July 21, 2023.

How can drivers prevent vehicle-bicycle crashes?

- When approaching a bicyclist from behind (whether they are riding on the road, shoulder, or bike lane) slow down, wait until there is no oncoming traffic, then change lanes to pass, allowing at least 3 feet of space between your car and the bicycle.
- Return to your lane only once you're clear of the bicycle.
- Change lanes even if a bike lane is present.

How can I get involved?

- Play the online game at planroanoke.org/game to test your knowledge of Virginia traffic safety laws for a chance to win prizes and gift cards to local Roanoke businesses!

Why is the campaign focused on drivers?

- From 2008 to 2021 crashes involving bicyclists have increased in Roanoke.
- We also know that when a vehicle is involved, the crash is likely to result in injury or even death.
- A campaign focused on driver passing behavior is a strategic way to address high-injury, bicyclists-involved crashes, and inform drivers of a relatively new Virginia law.

Why are people riding bikes on the road?

- Cyclists are allowed to use the full travel lane, even if a bike lane is present. This may be necessary to avoid hazards in the bike lane, prepare for a turn, and/or to prevent conflict if there is no room to pass.
- Debris including broken glass and tree branches often get blown into the bike lane by passing cars. People riding bikes may have to leave the bike lane to avoid these hazards.
- A cyclist may realize it is safer to ride in the road than the bike path and risk a flat tire or crash.
- Make sure to give them space. (Source: Roanokeva.gov)

Can I cross a double yellow line to change lanes to pass a bicyclist?

- Yes! Virginia law says drivers shall cross a double yellow line in order to give a bicyclist at least 3 feet of space when passing.

Can I change lanes to pass a bicyclist even in a “no-passing” zone (as indicated by a “no passing” sign)?

- If there is no oncoming traffic, when it is safe to do so, a motorist may pass a cyclist in a no-passing zone. The driver should slow down, confirm the sight line is adequate, there is no oncoming traffic and there is enough time and space to safely overtake the cyclist before initiating the passing maneuver.

Do more bike lanes help reduce collisions?

- Yes, research shows that when motorists and cyclists each have their own lanes, there are fewer crashes and injuries, and all users feel less stress. Buffered, protected and separated bicycle lanes reduces the risk of injury even further.
 - <https://www.peopleforbikes.org/statistics/safety>
 - <https://www.peopleforbikes.org/statistics/bicycle-facilities-and-safety>

What do I do if a bicyclist is riding on a street with no lane markings (for example, a neighborhood street with no centerline)?

- Slow down and pass when the road ahead is clear and there is no oncoming traffic, giving at least 3 feet of space between you and the bicyclist.

Do I need to give a bicyclist at least 3 feet of space even when they're in a bike lane?

- Yes. Virginia law says drivers shall give at least 3 feet and change lanes to pass even if a bicyclist is in a bike lane.

Do I need to give 3 feet of space AND change lanes to pass?

- In the City of Roanoke, because very few lanes are wide enough for a vehicle, a cyclist and 3+ feet of space between them, Changing Lanes to Pass is almost always the passing behavior required by VA Law.

How is the campaign funded?

- The campaign is funded by Federal highway safety funds through the Virginia Department of Motor Vehicles.