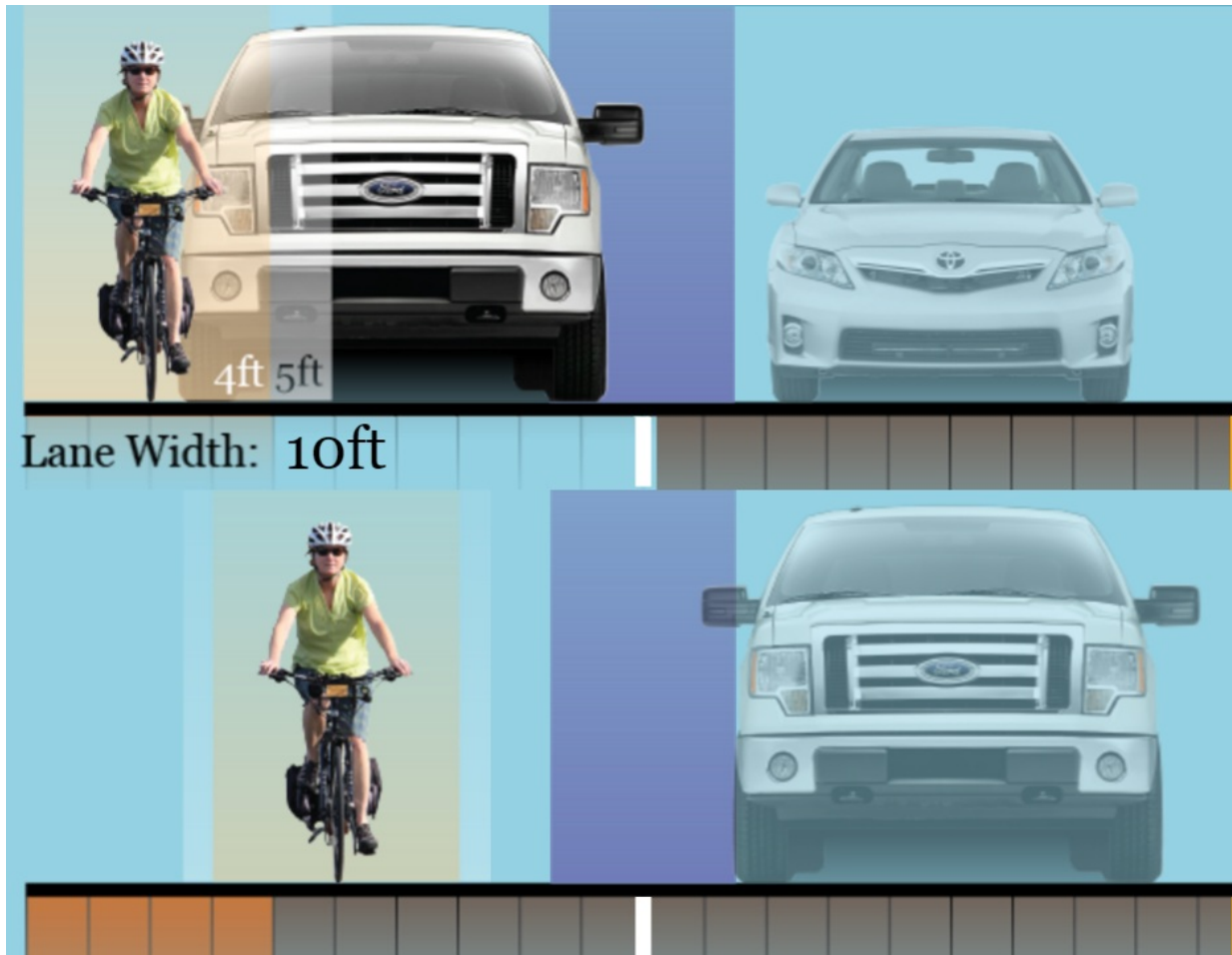


How to Pass a Bicyclist Source: BikeWalkNC



On most roads, motor vehicle drivers must move into the next lane to pass safely. Knowledgeable bicyclists will often ride near the center of a narrow travel lane to encourage this. [Image credit: [i am traffic](#)]

Motor vehicle drivers pass bicyclists safely countless times every day. When done improperly, however, the results can be tragic. Some drivers say that they are unsure of what to do when they encounter bicyclists on the road ahead. It's therefore important to increase public awareness of how to pass a bicyclist safely.

Safe passing of a bicyclist on ordinary roads requires following three simple steps:

1. **Slow Down.**
2. **Look and Wait for Other Traffic.**
3. **Change Lanes to Pass.**

Let's look at each step in detail:

1. **Slow Down**

Your first responsibility as a driver is to not hit other people who are already in front of you. This means always being prepared to match their speed or stop as required.

Slowing down ensures that you'll have the time you need to fully assess the road and traffic conditions prior to executing a safe pass. Lower speed also gives you more time to react should conditions change, and greatly reduces the danger you pose to the bicyclist should a collision occur.

If you're traveling too fast to slow down in time, that means you're violating the basic speed law. You must always limit your speed so that you can stop within the distance that you can see ahead. This principle is known as [assured clear distance ahead](#). Always choose a safe speed for conditions, and keep your eyes on the road.

2. Look and Wait for Other Traffic

Don't try to squeeze between a bicyclist and other traffic in the adjacent lane. On the vast majority of roads, travel lanes aren't wide enough for this to be safe. Attempting to squeeze past a bicyclist in the same lane is the most common cause of car-overtaking-bicycle collisions. You'll need space in the next lane in order to pass, so look for a safe gap in that traffic and wait as required. If the adjacent lane is for opposite-direction traffic, wait until you have sufficient sight distance to ensure that no traffic will arrive before you can complete the pass.

Some bicyclists will hug the right edge of a narrow travel lane in an effort to stay as far away from other traffic as they can manage. Don't misinterpret this as an invitation to pass within the same narrow lane; these bicyclists report lots of unsafe same-lane passing of the type that most often results in collisions. Knowledgeable bicyclists will often ride near the center of a narrow lane, or [ride two abreast](#), in order to deter motorists from making the mistake of trying to squeeze by. These cyclists aren't being rude; they are just [driving defensively](#).

3. Change Lanes to Pass

Once you have an adequate gap in traffic in the next lane, move completely into that lane. This will give the bicyclist a safe buffer and the room they need to maneuver for maintaining balance and avoiding surface hazards.

You may ask: "What if I start to pass and I realize that I've misjudged oncoming traffic?" Simple: Press your brake pedal, and slip back behind the bicyclist(s). No harm, no foul. Worst case: Stop completely, and let everybody sort it out. Stopped vehicles don't hurt people.

Here's a video from the Austin (Texas) Police Department that discusses safe passing: These three steps don't take much time and effort. In many cases there is no net delay to the motorist; in the worst cases, the delay is rarely longer than that of waiting for a traffic signal. If you experience delays that are longer in North Carolina, we'd like to know about it, so we can better understand the effects of road design and bicycle traffic on your convenience, and consequently support desirable road improvements and/or have an informed discussion about where and when bicyclists may be able to help you pass sooner. Send email to contact@bikewalknc.org to send us the North Carolina road location, time and date of where you first encountered a long delay, and where on the road the delay ended, and we'll share your information with NCDOT as well.

For more information about safe passing, see the following:

- [Safe Passing Principles, Laws, and Recommendations](#) by BikeWalk NC
- [Recommendation to allow passing bicycles on North Carolina Highways](#) by Kevin Lacy, State Traffic Engineer, NCDOT (also [here](#))
- [Safe Passing and Solid Centerlines](#) by BikeWalk NC
- [Crossing a Double Yellow Line](#) by Eli Damon, I Am Traffic
- [Sharing the Road, North Carolina Driver Handbook](#), Chapter 6, pages 81-82


I can stay here and squeeze past.

I need to change lanes.

How wide he thinks his car is


Where Savvy Cyclists ride to discourage that mistake.

How wide it really is


MAY USE FULL LANE

CHANGE LANES TO PASS

Most lanes are too narrow for a car to pass a bicyclist safely within the lane. Savvy Cyclists make that clear by leaving less space to their left. This is defensive driving. And it is legal in all 50 states. Regardless of where a bicyclist is, please don't risk a mistake. Change lanes to pass.

i am traffic.org  /iamtrafficorg

Graphic: i am traffic - iamtraffic.org

