

Boulder Cycling Club Policy Statement

Motorist/Cyclist Education Needed to Make Boulder County Rural Roads Safe

The overall goal of any policy for our County roads should be to provide for the safe and reasonable flow of traffic, including all forms of legal roadway users, on our rural roadways. In recent articles about the problems of motorist/cyclist safety and traffic congestion, the media has spotlighted aggressive motorists and reckless cyclists. However, they are only one aspect of a larger problem. Negligence and ignorance of safety issues cause many more accidents than aggression and intentional recklessness. These problems can only be addressed through heightened awareness and education. Enforcement is essential and helps a few people learn the “hard way,” but it is not enough and happens too slowly. Because law enforcement has limits, we must ultimately rely on roadway users behaving safely due to their own instinct for self-preservation informed by knowledge of safety issues.

A national survey by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety concluded that increased enforcement and awareness of “negative outcomes,” such as the potential for a car crash and the resulting increase in car insurance, are effective in promoting safe driving practices. However, the problem of traffic congestion can still be an issue in situations where there is little fear of enforcement or safety risks. A typical example is when cyclists are legally occupying a lane and holding up traffic. It seems that only courtesy will help in this situation. However, raising awareness of how the lack of courtesy can lead to frustrated drivers who make bad decisions that endanger all roadway users may be more effective than preaching courtesy to a cynical public.

To increase awareness of safety, road users can start at the GO Boulder – Share the Road program. This should be personalized by giving some thought to your specific driving/cycling situations and “cycling or driving a mile in the other guy's shoes.” In addition, sample a few of the 1.8 million articles generated by a Google search of “driver hits cyclists.” These shocking stories will definitely increase your awareness of potential

negative outcomes, including cyclists killed and maimed by motorists and the resulting grief, convictions of drivers for manslaughter and negligent homicide, and multi-million dollar lawsuits against drivers. However, don't let fear of injury keep you from cycling. **Traveling in an automobile is twice as dangerous per hour as cycling.**

Empathy and communication also improve courtesy. Unlike the few aggressive drivers depicted by the media, most rural residents are genuinely concerned about the safety of cyclists as well as their own convenience and unlike the few reckless biking daredevils, most cyclists are courteous and have no desire to inconvenience or endanger motorists. Better communication and cooperation between cycling and motorist/resident organizations will help increase good will and trust. However, only education on the rights and duties of motorists and cyclists will increase safe behavior.

An example of a situation where a little education, thought, empathy, and consideration can make the roads safer is the downhill rider blocking traffic. Many cyclists "flying" down Fourmile Canyon at 25 mph do not realize they are inconveniencing motorists behind them. They think they must be going the speed limit, and they cannot hear cars behind them due to wind in their ears. Time-pressured motorists following them become frustrated because they do not understand how unsafe it would be for cyclists to ride on the shoulder at 25 mph. Furthermore, many motorists mistakenly believe that the shoulder is a bike lane and cyclists are required by law to ride right of the white shoulder line. This frustration can lead to poor decisions about passing that endanger everyone on the road. A little courtesy by cyclists can improve this situation. They should make an effort to be aware of motorists behind them and slow down and pull to the right to let them pass. Motorists may also tolerate a slower speed if they think about how it makes them safer. Most rural drivers regularly exceed the speed limit. Lower speeds make them safer because rural, undivided highways have the most fatal collisions.

Cyclists should remember that over 75% of cycle/vehicle collisions involve turns and most of the time the cyclist is at fault. Of the remaining 25%, many do involve vehicles overtaking cycles as in the cyclist riding downhill

scenario above. Yes, cyclists have the right to ride double and occupy the car lane in some situations, but they also have the most to lose by not using the shoulder when they can. Don't be dead right. Also, they can reduce the risk of being struck from the rear by observing traffic approaching from the rear with a mirror or by frequent short rearward glances.

The BCC recommends a multi-faceted communications program by Boulder County to educate canyon road users, including: roadway signage (vertical and on the pavement), "rest area" info signs, standard public relations and media safety education efforts, and joint motorist/cyclist organization efforts such as events to make share concerns and solutions, and joint "Adopt a Highway" groups.

Inadequate roadways also lead to congestion and accidents. Thirty-seven percent of our population cannot or does not drive. This includes children, college students, seniors, environmentally and fitness conscious individuals and many other types of people. If we give the streets back to people, many more will take the opportunity to use them without cars. The County Transportation Department is actively seeking cost-effective ways to improve roadway infrastructure to keep up with increased population growth in Boulder county and increased interest in road biking. We encourage the County to adopt the policy of the National Complete Streets Coalition. A silver lining in this for rural residents is that studies show that overall cycling infrastructure improvements increase property values.

We also encourage the County Transportation Department to remedy the fact that road biking is the most under-served recreation activity in the County. This would entail an innovative approach to providing small road side rest stops for road bikers in strategic locations. Boulder is nationally recognized for its trails and open space that benefit walkers, hikers, climbers, mountain bikers, and commuter cyclists. However, very little has been done to benefit road bikers even though this is one of the larger recreational activities in the County and is growing rapidly. Almost all the paved trails are in the city of Boulder and not recommended for road bikers due to the high traffic of lower speed users such as walkers, children, kids with tubes, and commuter cyclists.

Some argue that bike lanes and shoulders are for the benefit of road bikers, but they primarily benefit motorists. A recent study by CTC has found that drivers give cyclists less consideration when cyclists are in bike lanes. Drivers tend to stay centered in their own lane rather than swing wide as they do when passing riders who are in the traffic lane. Where a cycle lane exists, drivers may overtake with the belief that they can use the entire road space outside the cycle lane, and consequently may be paying less attention to the cyclist's need for space. Therefore, the primary purpose of bike lanes is to increase the convenience of **motorists** by getting cyclists out of the car lanes. Without a bike lane cyclists have the right to occupy the car lane, which often results in slower traffic. Even the County pamphlet, "Bicycling Rights and Responsibilities", says that in some situations "it may be safer to ride in the middle of the lane . . . to be visible and to prevent unsafe passing by motorists." The new "3-2-1" state law requiring motorists to give 3 feet of clearance to cyclists should help, but few motorists know of it, and of those who do, many will think it is not necessary when bike lanes are present. In addition, three feet is not enough and is usually less than what a cyclist would get if they occupied a car lane forcing the driver to pass them like they would a car.

Enforcement is important for the small minority of motorists and cyclists who engage in reckless or aggressive behavior. We support any meaningful efforts by the County Sheriff's Department to increase enforcement, especially in those situations and areas that could result in serious accidents. We feel that less meaningful enforcement like issuing tickets to cyclists who roll through stop signs in rural areas where visibility is perfect and there are no motorists present should be a very low priority. Greater citizen reporting of reckless roadway users is also important.