

Chapter 6: Sharing the Road



Did you know that. . . ?

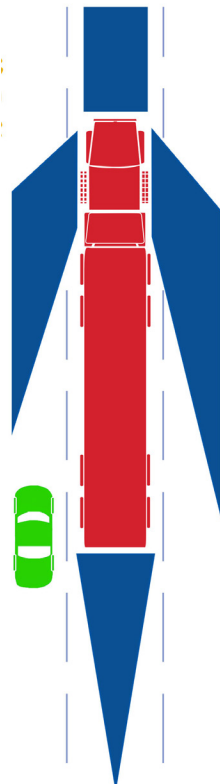
- In 1927, the Ford Motor Company produced its fifteen millionth Model T.
- In 1939, the 3-M Corporation introduced reflective sheeting for roadside signs.
- In 1942, the Willow Run and Detroit Industrial Expressway, the nation's first four-lane divided highway, was completed. Nearly 42,000 Detroit-area motorists used it daily to commute to the Ypsilanti bomber factory.

Commercial vehicles

Commercial vehicles are big. Their size and weight make it much more difficult for them to maneuver quickly. In the event of a crash with a commercial vehicle, the occupants of a car are much more likely to sustain injuries or fatalities.

Commercial vehicles cannot stop or maneuver as quickly or easily as a passenger vehicle. A passenger vehicle traveling at 55 mph can stop in about 130 feet. A commercial vehicle traveling at the same speed takes about 400 feet to stop.

Commercial vehicle drivers may not be able to see traffic directly in front of, alongside of, or close behind their vehicles. Large commercial trucks have blind spots or "no zones" (identified in blue in the image to the right). "No zones" are spaces in which motorists should not linger because they are not readily visible to the commercial driver. By hanging out in a commercial vehicle's "no zones," you are essentially



hidden from the truck driver's view and this increases the chances that the truck could hit you when it is changing lanes or turning. For visibility and safety when traveling at night, use your low beams when following a truck or bus.

Keep a safe distance behind a commercial vehicle. Do not draft off of it. Following a commercial vehicle too closely greatly increases the chances of a rear-end collision. When you drive right behind a commercial vehicle, the driver cannot see you, and you are severely limited as to what you can see on the road ahead. Extend the distance between your vehicle and a commercial vehicle even more as weather or road conditions deteriorate.

Commercial vehicles need room to make right turns. They may swing wide to the left to safely negotiate a right turn. When you see a commercial vehicle with its right-turn signal on at an intersection, know that the truck is going to make a wide right turn. The white stopping lines on the pavement are there for a reason. If you stop past the line, a commercial vehicle may not be able to complete its turn without hitting you.

Never cross behind a commercial vehicle that is preparing to back up or is backing up. Remember, most trailers are eight-and-a-half feet wide and can hide a car from view, preventing the truck driver from seeing your vehicle.

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When merging onto the freeway, commercial vehicles may not be able to move over, so match the flow of traffic as closely as possible, pick your spot and go. When exiting the freeway, leave space between you and the vehicle in front of you. Plan your move early and always signal your intentions as soon as possible.

Passing a commercial vehicle safely

Passing a commercial vehicle, especially the larger vehicles, requires forethought to avoid making mistakes that could be costly to you, the truck driver and other motorists.

- Signal intended lane changes or turns well in advance. Never cut off a commercial vehicle, force it to slow down or stop suddenly.
- Pass commercial vehicles on the left side and maintain a consistent speed when passing.
- As you pass, be sure you can see the entire cab of the truck in your rearview mirror before signaling and pulling back into the lane.
- Keep yourself visible to the commercial vehicle driver as you pass. Allow enough time and distance to pass safely.
- Keep both hands on the steering wheel. Commercial vehicles create strong air flow and draft when traveling at high speeds.
- When following a commercial vehicle, observe its turn signals before attempting to pass it. Be especially careful with trucks pulling a trailer. Often, a driver must swing out to the left or right before making a turn. The driver may not see you and could force you off the road.
- Avoid passing or driving next to trucks in roundabouts.
- Slow down if a truck or bus is passing you, especially during bad weather. Splash or spray from their tires can reduce visibility. Start your wipers before the vehicle passes.

Slow-moving vehicles



Slow-moving vehicles are those that cannot travel faster than 25 mph. Examples include Amish buggies, farm machinery such as combines and tractors pulling trailers or wagons, and industrial and construction equipment. "Four-wheelers" and golf carts are not considered slow-moving vehicles.

A slow-moving vehicle will have an orange triangle mounted on the back to warn motorists of the vehicle's limited speed. Do not get impatient if behind a slow-moving vehicle. The driver will usually try to pull over to the side whenever possible to prevent traffic back-ups.

When following a horse and rider or a horse-drawn buggy, reduce your speed to 15-20 mph and maintain a safe distance of at least 20 feet between your vehicle and the rider or buggy so as not to spook the horse. Pass with caution when safe to do so. Never honk the horn or rev the engine, as loud noises can startle horses.

Pedestrians

Always yield the right of way to pedestrians. This includes people walking, jogging, hiking, skateboarding, pushing strollers, etc. You must take every precaution to avoid a collision with a pedestrian.

Watch for pedestrians when entering a street from a driveway or alley, at stop signs, traffic signals, roundabouts, crosswalks and intersections. Pedestrians may also cross in the middle of a block, even if there is a crosswalk nearby.

Even if you have a green light, you must yield to people crossing the street or intersection.

Never attempt to pass another vehicle that has stopped for a pedestrian. Be especially cautious when a large truck or bus is stopped because its large size may block a pedestrian from your view.

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If a street does not have a sidewalk, pedestrians should face oncoming traffic if they choose to walk along the road's edge. Keep an eye out for pedestrians on both sides of the road.

Make extra allowances for the elderly, the young and people with disabilities. They may require a little more time to cross a street.

You are required by law to stop or yield the right of way for a pedestrian with a white cane or guide dog. Avoid honking your horn or revving the engine; these noises are distracting and cover important audible cues used by people with visual impairments.

Michigan law also requires drivers to stop at the marked crosswalk limit line or before entering the intersection if no limit line exists. Never block a crosswalk. Not only does it make it difficult for people with visual and other mobility challenges to navigate, it creates an unsafe environment for pedestrians crossing the street.

Mid-block crosswalks provide pedestrians with safe crossing along roadways at places other than intersections. A yield line is sometimes used to indicate the location where drivers should stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk. See Figure 6.1.

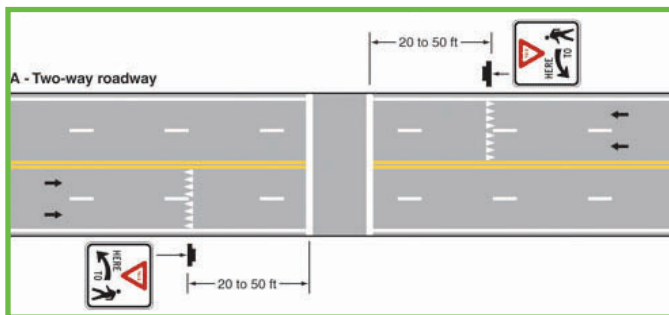


Figure 6.1.

Children

Pay close attention around parked cars, near school zones, play grounds and parks where children are likely to be present. Children are unpredictable and can dart out into the street unexpectedly.

Motorcycles, scooters, mopeds and bicycles

When sharing the road with motorcycles, scooters, and mopeds, it is important to understand the special characteristics and limitations of these vehicles.

While their smaller size makes these two-wheeled and three-wheeled vehicles economical to operate, it also makes it difficult to see them and to accurately judge their speed and distance. This puts them at a disadvantage in traffic. Any crash between a larger vehicle and a motorcycle, scooter, moped or bicycle almost always injures or kills the operator of the smaller vehicle. Keep the following points in mind when sharing the road with motorcycles, scooters and bicycles.

- Always treat motorcyclists and scooter, moped and bicycle riders with courtesy. Give them room. Pass them as you would any other vehicle – when it is safe and legal to move over into an adjacent lane. Remember that motorcycle, scooter, moped and bicycle riders are allowed to share a lane.
- Intersections are one of the highest risk locations for crashes between vehicles and motorcycles, scooters and bicycles. For example, motorists frequently respond to police after a crash that they did not even see the motorcyclist.
- Exercise extreme caution when making a left turn at an intersection. Be alert for possible oncoming motorcyclists, scooter operators or bicyclists. Left turns present a higher risk for crashes because it is easy for you to misjudge their speed and distance because of their smaller profile. Always assume motorcyclists and other small vehicles are closer than they appear and wait for them to pass before turning.
- Tailgating is illegal. Leave at least 3 or 4 seconds of travel space between your vehicle and a motorcyclist, scooter operator or bicyclist. They can usually stop in shorter distances than a car and may have to swerve suddenly, slow down or change lanes to avoid or adjust to obstacles such as potholes, pavement transitions or railroad crossings.
- A fast moving vehicle creates a lot of airflow and draft. Be mindful that your vehicle's "wind blast" can startle or even push a motorcyclist, scooter

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operator or bicyclist off balance, increasing the chances of a crash.

- Check for turn signals or hand signals from a motorcyclist, scooter operator or bicyclist. Additionally, if the vehicle moves to the left or right side of a lane, if the operator turns to check for traffic or begins to lean or tilt the vehicle, it is likely the rider is planning to turn.



- Look carefully because the single headlight or taillight on a motorcycle, scooter, moped or bicycle can blend into the lights of other vehicles.
- Before changing lanes, check to see if a motorcyclist, scooter operator or bicyclist is in your blind spot or in the space where you plan to move. After you pass, look again before you move back into the other lane. Make sure you can see the rider clearly in your rearview mirror. Many crashes happen because motorists failed to check their blind spots and did not see the rider.
- When parking your vehicle, check your mirrors before opening your door. Use your right hand to open the door, so you will automatically look over your left shoulder for oncoming cyclists and pedestrians. Opening a vehicle door in the path of approaching traffic, including motorcycles, scooters and bicycles is dangerous and illegal.

Specifically about motorcyclists

It is illegal for motorists to drive beside motorcyclists or pass them in the same lane. Pass by using an adjacent lane when it is legal and safe to do so. Always lookout for motorcyclists when driving, especially at intersections and on busy city streets, which is where most vehicle-motorcycle crashes occur.

Motorcyclists operating vehicles with engine sizes of 125cc or greater are legally allowed to drive on

freeways and limited-access highways. Be aware that motorcyclists make up the mix of vehicles on freeways and highways in addition to suburban and urban roadways.

- A motorcyclist's single headlight and smaller profile in traffic can distort a motorist's perception of the motorcyclist's true speed and distance, making it appear that the motorist has more time to complete their turn or lane change than they really do. This risk increases in adverse weather conditions and at night when vision is limited.
- Motorcyclists frequently use engine braking and downshifting, techniques used with manual transmissions that slow down the vehicle without activating the brake lights. To be safe, keep extra space between you and a motorcyclist, especially on city streets.



As a motorist, use your horn judiciously. Avoid horn blasts that may startle riders and put them at an increased risk of a crash.

Moped or scooter?

According to Michigan law, a moped is defined as a motor vehicle that:

- Has two or three wheels and is equipped with an engine that does not exceed 100 cc piston displacement,
- Cannot propel itself at a speed greater than 30 mph on a level surface, and,

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- Has a power drive system that does not require the operator to shift gears.

“Scooter” is a generic term for two-wheeled vehicles that applies to mopeds and to higher-powered machines that do not fit the definition of a moped.

Bicyclists

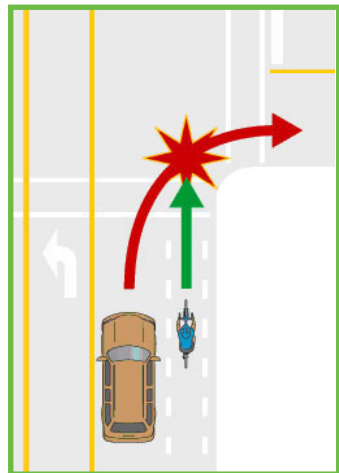
Bicyclists may legally ride on Michigan roads, except limited access freeways. They may ride anywhere in the lane as long as they are riding with traffic. Bicyclists have the same rights and responsibilities as motorists.

Obey all lane markings.

Look for bicyclists riding from behind on the road shoulder or in a bike lane before turning right at an intersection, into a driveway or pulling off the road. As appropriate, yield and allow them to pass before turning.

Do not use the bicycle lane as a right-turn lane. Do not overtake a bicyclist and turn right unless it is safe to do so.

Michigan law requires that you leave at least 3 feet of space between your vehicle and a bicyclist when passing. If this is impractical, pass at a safe distance and at a safe



speed. This may require you to use another lane or wait for an opportunity to safely pass. You may pass a bicyclist in a no-passing zone as long as it is safe to do so. Some cities have stricter laws requiring a 5-foot passing distance.

After passing, don't return to your lane until well clear of the bicycle or other vulnerable roadway users. Large vehicles and vehicles towing oversized loads should allow even more space and time when passing a bicyclist.

Bicyclists are not required to use a bicycle lane and may leave a bicycle lane to turn left or to avoid hazards.

Be aware that low-riding, three-wheeled recumbent cyclists and three-wheeled super-recumbent handcycle riders also use Michigan roadways. These bikes are almost always equipped with rear view mirrors and many riders use tall orange flags for additional visibility, but these cycles can be difficult to see due to their low profiles.

Autocycles

An autocycle is a motorcycle that has safety belts, a roll bar or roll hoops, a steering wheel and other equipment required on a motorcycle. It has three wheels and is not equipped with a straddle seat.

Because of its smaller profile, give an autocycle the same respect as motorcycles and other small vehicles on the road. As with motorcycles, scooters, mopeds and bicycles, be especially watchful for autocycles at intersections, in busy traffic and when turning.

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Notes