

Chapter 6—Enforcement Related to Transit



Enforcement is one of the 5 E's of Complete Streets. The others are Education, Encouragement, Engineering, and Evaluation. This section is a compilation of Ohio laws and common sense rules for bicyclists. Other sections will cover similar information for other users, such as pedestrians, transit users, and motorists.

Pedestrians and Transit

Pedestrians are particularly vulnerable if they are in a crash with a motorized vehicle. One of the most frequent crash locations for pedestrian crashes is crosswalks. Motorists, which includes transit operators, are required to yield to pedestrians in a crosswalk.

- Pedestrians need to exercise caution at crosswalks as not all motorists will obey the law.
- Pedestrians waiting to board transit vehicles at night should use extra caution. Reflective material or lights may be helpful in alerting motorists of the pedestrian's presence. This can also help to alert transit operators that a person is at the transit stop.
- In Columbus, The Ohio State University transit vehicles are CABS buses, usually painted red. Passengers may board and exit the vehicle at the rear or the front door, since no fare is collected. This is different from COTA vehicles, where one should board at the front door and exit at the rear door.
- When transit users exit the public transportation bus, they should use caution if crossing a street. All lanes of motor vehicle traffic do not have to stop for the bus, as they do for school buses.
- Pedestrians exiting a bus need to be especially careful if the bus shields them from view of other motorists.



◀ A pedestrian boards a COTA bus in Columbus, OH.
(Source: MORPC, 2010)

Bicyclists and Transit

Similar to pedestrians, bicyclists are particularly vulnerable if they are in a crash with a motorized vehicle. On most roadways, except for limited access highways, such as freeways, bicyclists are allowed to use the full lane if needed. It is important to ensure that motorists are respecting bicyclists on the road.

- Many states have passed a law that a motorist must give 3 feet to a bicyclist when passing; however, that law has not yet been adopted in Ohio.
- Bicyclists are generally prohibited from riding in crosswalks and sidewalks. Transit vehicles may interact with bicyclists using the sidewalk at driveways and intersections. This is especially true for child bicyclists, who are commonly allowed to ride on the sidewalk.
- Transit vehicles tend to interact with on-street bicyclists when moving to the curb to pick up or drop off passengers, as bicyclists are more commonly found in the right-most travel lane than in other lanes. Therefore, both transit vehicles and bicyclists must use extra caution around transit stops.
- **Bicyclists must always pass on the left**, unless passing on the right is explicitly permitted. Passing on the right can be dangerous and may be illegal. This is true for both bicyclists and transit vehicles.
- Since vehicles parked in the road or bike lane are only stopped temporarily, bicyclists must be cautious, even when passing on the left. The other vehicle may start moving forward or to the left. It is therefore recommended to provide three feet of clearance when passing.
- Professional drivers, such as transit vehicle operators and commercial drivers, should be educated with regard to bicyclists' rights and should be discouraged from harassing bicyclists.



▲ A COTA bus stops to pick up passengers and a bicyclist prepares to pass the bus on the left. (Source: MORPC, 2010)

Bus-Only Lanes

When a transit vehicle does not have dedicated, physically separated lanes, there will be interactions between the transit vehicle and other users, predominantly motorists. Locally, COTA buses do have signed bus-only lanes on High Street, but they are not separated in the way that a light-rail vehicle may have its own tracks.

- Bus-only lanes can improve the transportation system by making bus travel more efficient and less subject to traffic delays. This has the additional benefit of increasing transit mode share and reducing congestion.
- Some degree of enforcement is needed for bus-only lanes in order to prevent non-transit drivers from disregarding the regulation. Photo enforcement may help to solve this problem.
- In some circumstances, it may be practicable *for other users, such as bicyclists and taxicabs, to be permitted in bus-only lanes.*
- Some bus-only lanes are only restricted during peak hours. For example, High Street in downtown Columbus, OH restricts one lane in each direction to buses and taxis from 7 - 9 a.m. and 4 - 6 p.m. on weekdays.



◀ Bus-only lane blocked by parked vehicles in New York, NY.

(Source: Flickr User BicyclesOnly)

Transit Operator – Good Driving Behavior

There are a variety of poor driving behaviors that transit operators would wish to avoid. These include distracted driving, using cell phones, and running red lights. For more information on these, check the factsheet on motorist enforcement, section 6.4. Summary information is provided below.

Distracted Driving

A distracted driver is any driver whose attention is not fully focused on the task of driving. This can contribute to the likelihood of a crash. Distraction may be caused by a wide range of activities, such as eating, drinking, talking to passengers, applying makeup and other grooming, or reading maps.

- In 2009, 5,474 people died and an estimated 448,000 people were injured in police-reported crashes in the United States in which at least one form of driver distraction was recorded (U.S. DOT Distracted Driving website, "[Stats and Facts](#)").
- Many states currently do not collect data on cell phone/electronic equipment distraction in police crash reports (GHSA, "[Cell Phone and Texting Laws](#)"), which means that the true numbers are likely higher than those cited above.
- Starting in 2012, Ohio's crash reports will have a section where cell phone use can be recorded.



◀ A driver distracted by using the keypad of a handheld phone.

(Source: Flickr User Kordite)

Increase in Crash Risk From Cell Phone Use

A study from the Virginia Tech Transportation Institute estimated the increase in crash risk caused by various types of cell phone use while driving. Text messaging is particularly dangerous ([VTTI, 2009](#)).

- For heavy vehicles and trucks, dialing a cell phone results in a crash risk 5.9 times higher than non-distracted driving.
- For heavy vehicles and trucks, text messaging results in a crash risk 23.2 times higher than non-distracted driving.

Red Light Running

Red light running is risky behavior by any user. This combines the conflict point of the intersection with high-speed driving, precisely when other road users may start their own movement.

- According to the [Insurance Institute for Highway Safety](#), 676 people were killed and an estimated 113,000 were injured in crashes that involved red light running in the United States in 2009.
- Red light running is a widespread motorist behavior. A study conducted at five busy intersections during several months in Fairfax, Virginia (prior to red light camera installation) found that on average, a motorist ran a red light every 20 minutes at each intersection ([IIHS](#)).

Railroad Crossings



Motorists, including transit operators, should exercise extra caution at railroad crossings. Due to the high speed and huge weight of railroad vehicles, all roadway users are extremely vulnerable if they are involved in a crash with a train. Motorists are no exception. Below are additional rules for motorists near railroads (Texas Department of Insurance, [Railroad Crossing Safety Fact Sheet](#)):

- Motorists always need to yield to flashing lights, whistles, closing gates, crossbucks, or stop signs at a railroad crossing.
- Motorists are not allowed to try to “beat” a train.
- Motorists are not allowed to pass another vehicle within 100 feet of a railroad crossing.
- Some vehicles must stop at all railroad crossings, such as school buses. Use caution when travelling behind these vehicles, since they will stop even if no train can be detected.
- If a motorist is crossing the railroad tracks and the gate comes down behind them, they need to keep driving. They are allowed to break the gate in front of them if necessary.
- Trains have the right-of-way 100% of the time over emergency vehicles, cars, law enforcement, bicyclists and pedestrians (Operation Lifesaver Inc., [Safety Tips](#)).

Motorists ►
waiting at a
railroad crossing in
Vincennes, IN
(Source: [Route 50 Blog](#))

Sources

Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), “Cell Phone and Texting Laws,” updated Jan. 2011. http://www.ghsa.org/html/stateinfo/laws/cellphone_laws.html (retrieved Jan. 14, 2011)

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