Cyclist May Use Full Lane…But Should We?
The “bicycle may use full lane” signs have started emerging all over, and one just recently popped up on a road that leads to several of my training routes. But I’m not so sure about them.

The history of these signs (also known as R4-11) dates back to their origin in 2009, but have definitely become more popular over the past year. They were introduced to be used for the following purpose:

BIKES MAY USE FULL LANE (R4-11) signs are intended for use where travel lanes are too narrow for bicyclists and motor vehicles to operate side by side in the same lane. However, the presence of a sign is not necessary for cyclists to use the full lane. Rather, the sign serves as a reminder of the law in locations where the volume of cyclists, the roadway geometry, and other conditions suggest that motorists may frequently encounter cyclists occupying the center of the travel lane.

Okay, so as a cyclist who is passionate about our sport, of course I like seeing laws being made and changes that make roads better and safer for us to ride on…but I’m not totally convinced about the effectiveness of the “May Use Full Lane” signs. At least not in all situations.

Let me take the sign over here on Bee Cave Parkway as an example. The road doesn’t have a shoulder area to ride on, but it does have two lanes of traffic going each way with what I feel is more than enough room to ride along comfortably at the side of the road. Since the sign went up a few months ago, I’ve only seen one cyclist riding down the center of the lane….but I’m sure there have been a whole lot more.

That time where I did see a cyclist using the lane, I also witnessed a vehicle who appeared to be annoyed at the bike being there and quite aggressively swerved around him to get by. I personally don’t feel like that cyclists need to ride down the center of this road, at least not at the time of day that I’m on it. It’s not over crowded and there’s plenty of room for vehicles to pass by when riding at the side of the road. Plus, with these signs being quite new…drivers don’t know how to use them or even pay attention to them being there. All it takes is one distracted driver (yeah, remember to Drop the Phone) and a cyclist taking up the center of lane is toast.

But like I said, there are instances where these signs do make things better and can still keep cyclists safe. In downtown San Antonio they have very narrow cobblestone like streets. The traffic is super slow and whole downtown vibe is quite cool. There’s also a lot of cyclists who ride these roads and being allowed to take up the full lane works perfectly fine. In the times I’ve been there, I’ve never witnessed any frustrated drivers and the cohesiveness of vehicle and bicycle seems to flow quite nicely.

So that’s my opinion…what’s yours? I thought it would be interesting to get the opinion of my cycling friend and Chicago bicycle accident lawyer, Jonathan Rosenfeld. Here’s what Jonathan has to say about the May Use Full Lane issue:

“I frequently see bicyclists expose themselves to added dangers when they hug the shoulder of the roadway. Even when cyclists remain on the roadway itself, the edge of the road is frequently littered with debris and uneven surfaces which can contribute to falls or rapid maneuvers to avoid the obstacle.

Particularly in cities where street parking may be allowed, riding along close to the side of the road may expose cyclists to situations involving ‘doorings’ where drivers open their car doors without looking.

Consequently, bicyclists need to remember that they have just as much of a right to use the roadway as vehicles—and by positioning themselves squarely within the lane of traffic they actually may be taking an important measure to improve their safety.”

There’s even been a Facebook page set up promoting the fact that cyclists belong in the traffic lane, and they recently came out with this little graphic explaining why we belong to be there.
It’s good reasoning, but I still personally feel that it may not be safe for a cyclist to take advantage of the full lane in many situations. The signs continue to pop up and time will tell how effective they are, and if they improve conditions out on the road... and make life better for us cyclists.

Nice topic. I like the signs they make motorists realize that the bike is entitled to the road and the lane. This should make them more accepting. I think the reason for the sign is it is cheaper than building safe bike lanes. They give cities all the glory of being bike friendly with none of the cost especially when so few bikes may even use them. An alternate sign could read “Bikes Welcome.”

As to taking the lane I like the 2/3 rule. I would be an idiot and an asshole to take up the entire lane but sometimes you need to. Maybe a third of the time I will take up more of the lane to close the door on motorists passing me in the lane. An example is I know the two lanes get narrow up ahead and there are potholes near the curb. If I stay far right the cars trying to use the lane may choke me out of room when I need it and it is so tight anyway they will be real close so I hog enough of the lane to make them take a lane to get around. When the road widens I swing back to the right so they know I am not riding the lane just getting space.

Other times I will take dead center of the lane is traffic under 30mph. If I can hold the bumper of the car ahead of me the car behind can’t try to squeeze by and then slow down to make the next turn.
can't try to squeeze by and then slow down to make the next turn.

When I get within about 5 car lengths from a stopped car at a light I take the lane. Other wise while I am almost there someone will try to cut in so I close the door. When traffic starts moving I pull over after the light. Many of the cars trying to beat you to the light want to turn anyway so I don't have to get squeezed by them and then cut off.

The last place I take the entire lane is in a “Gutter Fuck” position. Gutter fucking is when a car that wants to get in the left lane will travel the right lane until the last chance then cut in. They go too fast and then stop blocking the lane trying to merge. I take their spot forcing them to merge sooner behind me. On a good day I can gutter fuck 50 cars before the light.

In closing it is good that driver know the law allows you to use as much of the lane you may need and it is good to know you are allowed to take it if you feel you need too. But don’t do it like me.

Thanks for your comments, Charles...and for letting us know your game plan out on the road.

Darryl is Loving the Bike

Tim Starry • 23 days ago

respectfully disagree, especially on Bee Cave Parkway. the travel lanes are not wide enough to allow both a vehicle and a bicycle to "share" the lane unless you accept the premise that it's ok to pass so close as to pose a not insignificant risk to the rider. there are two lanes and very rarely is traffic so busy on that road that waiting to move over to the left lane imposes an unreasonable delay on the motorist. in fact, I would be willing to bet that the "delay" is barely 15 seconds...motorists need to get a grip on their hurry up cars do not have priority over public streets and roads...regardless of speed or size...the sooner we educate people on that principle the better and there are hundreds of spots in this city where use of full lane is both appropriate and much safer than hugging the curb. I could show you more than you would care to see, if you would extend your cycling outside the narrow focus of road fitness riding

Hey Tim, great to see your comments on this one. I totally agree that education is the best thing that can be done for everyone. I also agree that on some roads it’s better and safer to take the lane than hug the shoulder. I’m still not so sure about the signs in some areas and there’s something about them that really scares me. We’ll have to wait and see how this all plays out.

Darryl is Loving the Bike

GroupW • 23 days ago

I generally stay as far right as I feel is safe (usually the right tire groove) to allow motorists to see and get by, yet not be able to crowd me off the shoulder. I try to take more lightly travelled routes so I don’t impede motorists on busier streets, but sometimes there is no option. If I take one highway East out of the city, the first few miles have a curb. Since it is a 5-lane road (2 lanes each direction and center turn lane), I take the lane because motorists will force you to the curb if you don’t and there is room to go around. As a previous poster indicated, the delay to pass a bicycle is typically just seconds. Unless they have a badge or flashing lights and a siren, a few seconds should not be an issue.

We appreciate your input on this one. Thanks for adding to the discussion.

Darryl is Loving the Bike

Roaster_boy • 23 days ago

Your reasoning seems that allowing a cyclist the full lane will only raise the ire of motorists, and therefore is not a good idea. As for the distracted drive, they occur whether you're taking the lane or not. It's is a safety issue that cannot be addressed only by a sign, but one that needs to be based around driver education.
Thanks for your comments. You are totally right that driver (and cyclist) education is really the key. I have talked to a few non-riding drivers out there who absolutely do not like seeing a cyclist in the lane. In their opinion they've told me that the law is that they can only be there if they can keep up with the speed of traffic. Yes, totally wrong...but that is how they feel (again, education will help). Because of this, there is the issue of irate drivers getting annoyed at cyclists riding in the lane even if they are allowed to be there.

If they're irate it means they see you! :) Actually, courtesy on the road is also important to safety. When taking the lane I generally stay to the right of center (in the track of the car's right wheels where there is generally less debris). When stopping at a light I usually pull to the center of the lane so that cars don't try to squeeze by while I'm stopped. (as soon as they get by me they forget I'm there and are likely to sideswipe me when the light changes.)

You're right, David....being seen is definitely a good thing.

There's a sign on Pleasant Valley when it crosses Towne Lake at the Longhorn Dam. There are two traffic lanes each way with no shoulder. If I were to ride close to the side which is a concrete barrier I feel like I would be alot LESS safe. So, I follow the advice of the sign and take the entire lane. Drivers can easily pass me in the other lane and everyone is safer for it all.

Hi Pedro, good to hear from you. There are definitely situations where I feel they make more sense and are more justified. My personal opinion is that in areas like the one found on Bee Cave Parkway, it just might cause more problems. Keep on riding and loving the bike.

I'm 100% with you on this one. I think that when we as cyclist force the issue it can do more harm than good. My wife runs a traffic school and whenever the subject of cyclists comes up there are some pretty contentious feelings towards them in almost all of the cases. I think it should be a combination of education, better infrastructure, and just plain old common courtesy. After all, depending on the road, we are disrupting normal flows of traffic and it can be very frustrating when there might be opportunities to pass but the cyclist is trying to prove a point by taking up the whole lane. And of course my favorite saying... we as cyclists might be "right" on the issue, but we might end up being "dead right".

Cyclists are NOT "disrupting the normal flows of traffic." First off, cyclists are traffic, and normal flows of traffic to boot. Second any minor delays of motor vehicles due to cyclists in urban or suburban areas are quickly regained before the next stoplight/sign. It is a myth that cyclists slow traffic. We may slow individual motor vehicles momentarily, but we do not disturb the smooth flow of traffic.

Great comments, Brian. It is a subject that needs continued improvement and the implementation of good ideas and education. Unfortunately there are a lot of drivers out there that do not care about us cyclists and is the cause for a lot of problems. Yes, common courtesy is really a great thing and let's keep on being good examples and watching others follow our lead.
susan swope • 12 days ago
I live in suburban St. Louis directly located off of a five lane (4 traffic lanes plus a suicide lane) state highway so I have no other option than to be a part of the traffic. I have found it safer to ride in the center of the lane I am traveling in at all times. Motorist will generally move over earlier when they see me and realize that the lane is not wide enough to share. Those who don’t change lanes earlier may have to wait a minute or so to change lanes later. Some motorists have appeared irate but as of yet no one has run me down. Recently I have been using a recumbent tricycle due to a broken arm. When I have traveled the neighborhood highway using the center of the lane more motorists than usual changed lanes earlier and no one laid on the horn. My theory is that the drivers realized that it would be impossible to share the lane with a tricycle so they made no attempt to shove me into the three inches of glass that lies to the right of the white line. We don’t have May Use Full Lane signs but I would welcome them. I think further explanation in the form of another sign that reads “Change Lanes To Pass Cyclists” would be appropriate too. Still loving the bike, even if it’s a trike right now!

Darryl is Loving the Bike Mod ⇒ susan swope • 11 days ago
Thanks for your comments, Susan. I hope your recovery goes quick but it’s great to see you still out there on the recumbent.

I think you’re right about better signs and education. It’s not the signs I’m not sure about...it’s about the drivers not knowing what to do or how to use them.

Janice in GA • 20 days ago
I kinda disagree. There are a few routes I travel where there are 4 lane streets (2 lanes in each direction.) If I DON’T move into the lane, I get more close, dangerous passes. It actually makes me anxious to do this, because I hate worrying about whether I’m pissing some car driver off. :/ And you get the occasional jerk who will come up behind you and honk their horn EVEN WHEN THERE ARE NO CARS IN THE LEFT LANE. IOW, just a creep who thinks he/she needs to make a point. O.o

We don’t have lots of bike riders in my area, and I can really tell when I go on a road where they’re not used to seeing cyclists. People pass much less safely on those roads, and that’s when I move into the lane.

It goes without saying that I avoid roads like this as much as possible, because I hate feeling stressed over this stuff. But in some places, there just aren’t alternate routes. Having to cross an interstate highway is like having to cross a river: all the routes are busy, and there aren’t many of them.

Darryl is Loving the Bike Mod ⇒ Janice in GA • 20 days ago
Thanks Janice. Yeah, it all depends on the situation and in some places it does make sense to be in the lane. Most important is that a cyclist does what they feel is most safe...and that drivers understand what's going on and keep them safe.

BicycleHSV • 23 days ago
Not "must". Key word is "may". Which means it may depend on conditions.Debris, lane control approaching intersections, etc.

Krisay • 23 days ago
As far as riding down the center of the lane, I don't think that's ever a great idea due to the several reasons you stated, Darryl. I personally think that it's our responsibility as cyclists to be ambassadors for the sport. Anytime I'm riding on a road I right to the right as far over as I can do so SAFELY. Most of the time this means I'm about 2-3' from the edge of the road so that I'm not riding in broken glass, chunks of cement, or other debris that commonly finds it's home in that area. This also ensures that I don't drop a wheel off the side of the road, possibly overcorrect, and go down in front of a car. I don't aim to hold up traffic and do my best to allow others to get around me with ease. While I know we have the right to the roads too, I feel that if a driver has a "good experience" in sharing the road with a me, they may be more likely to show patience and understanding in future encounters with other cyclists on the road.

I like the signs because they serve as a good reminder. Like those deer crossing signs that are put up in certain areas, they help to remind us that those are areas where you may be more likely to encounter a deer, but we all know that you can have a run-in with a deer out of those zones as well. It's the same concept really. Those signs are nice to have in heavier bike traffic areas, but it certainly doesn't mean that the same rule don't apply once you distance yourself from that spot.
Thanks for jumping in on this one, Krissy. Yeah, having the signs up are definitely a good warning sign to watch out for us for sure. Maybe they should change them to "bike crossing" signs....hahahaha.

I just saw the first of these in my city last week. I've yet to form an opinion of them or whether I will make use of the full lane. The comments from this article are very interesting.

Yes we do deserve to use the full lane but I must admit that I'm often too scared to take advantage of it. I actually haven't seen any cyclists using the full lane in the areas around here that have them.

I prefer to stay out of the direct line of traffic. I know the sign might say we may use the full lane, but I honestly don't trust the drivers to read and obey those signs. I feel safer at the side of the road where I cycle.

I'd say it depends on the road and how experience the drivers are with driving around cyclists. On a winding road it may be hard to see a cyclist ahead when you are driving so a cyclist really needs to access the situation and determine if riding in the lane is the best place to be.

I think I like the idea of the signs paired with good driver education. I don't think simply one approach will work better than another. As a teacher/mom, I've noticed that I often have to teach things two or three ways before it starts to sink in.

On a side note: our homeschool group is going to be having a "bicycle workshop" at some point within the next year. What information do you think would be valuable considering our age range is anywhere from 5 years old to 55 years, and I only have about 2 hours to get it all in? I'm considering asking someone from the local bike shop, but is there one piece of info I need to make sure they have?
I just noticed one of these signs in my city recently as well. I've rode my bike on it but have not yet taken up more than the shoulder that I have always used. I don't feel it necessary to take up any more space and have never felt squeezed out by vehicles or anything like that. I do agree that on some roads the signs would help bikes and vehicles coexist better. Great article, Darryl.

Thanks for your comments, Ben. I do hope that we all begin to coexist better in the near future.

Darryl is Loving the Bike

23 days ago

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Is it possible to have an entire years meals planned based on an athlete’s particular training program?

**Kelli’s Answer:**

Although its sounds perfect to have a meal plan that correlates well with a training program, all laid out for a year, in my experience, it simply doesn’t work well (sorry). This is why I don’t use this approach:

1) Unlike Training Nutrition, your Daily Nutrition meals do not need to reflect your training program. They should be based on health and wellness. Foods and meals to provide nutrients that support good, consistent energy flow, a healthy metabolism, disease prevention, and overall health. They should be whole-food, slow-digesting foods with a lot of vegetables, fruits, healthy fats, healthy proteins, and fiber. They are appropriate for athletes and non-athletes alike, year round.

2) Training Nutrition, on the other hand, which is made up of easy-to-digest foods and drinks to be consumed immediately before, during, and immediately after training, should reflect your training program. They should be somewhat opposite of healthy Daily Nutrition in that they are quick-digesting, low-fiber foods that promote immediate and ongoing energy adequate fluids, and adequate electrolytes, without risk of digestion issues. These should be based on the duration and intensity of your training, and if you’re training once or mul
times in a day.

3) For Training Nutrition, while it’s okay to have some variety within your choices, you want to stick with foods and drinks that work well for you. You simply don’t want to “up” on yourself too much – this is more about effectiveness and efficiency of the foods, and not variety. If Hammer Heed works best for you, keep using it. If you like your carbs and fluid/lytes in water and NUUN caps, stick with it. If a mini Clif bar works well for you, or a smoothie before a ride, use it in training so you’ll have confidence using it before competition. Plan the ride, and ride the plan, right?

4) For a year-long Daily Nutrition Plan, I’ve learned it doesn’t work well for most people – it simply doesn’t allow enough flexibility to work out. In my practice, I used to plan full month’s of meals for clients, based on their needs, likes/dislike, etc, and even include a shopping list. What’s I found was that a) my time into it simply demanded too high a price for most clients didn’t want or need a different meal option for breakfast, lunches, and snacks each day (variety is good for dinner, though), c) since it had a shopping list it didn’t have flexibility needed for everyday life, schedule changes, food dislike/like changes, and diet changes.

My solution:

What I’ve found is using a mix-and-match format, where I suggest 8-12 different recommendations for breakfasts, lunches, and snacks, and then 15-20 different ones with ongoing planning for dinner, works well. It gives clients the details they want and need, with the flexibility to work in real life. And, since every meal meet my standards for health and wellness, any of them are fine to use day to day. Then, for training nutrition, I provide ~5-10 suggestions for pre-training, during training, and recovery fuel that you can experiment with until you find your right mix. I also give you recommendations on when to use each type of training fuel (pre-, during, recovery), and how much based on duration and intensity.

Please send us your questions for our Expert Sports Nutritionist, Kelli Jennings to “Ask the Sports Nutritionist”. Kelli Jennings is a Registered Dietitian with a passion for health and wellness, & sports nutrition. For more information go to www.apexnutritionllc.com.

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