



Re: Cycling

To Promote Bicycling as an Enjoyable, Safe, Healthy, Environmentally Friendly Activity for All Ages and Abilities

Otsego Regional Cycling Advocates (ORCA) 547-4020

How to Avoid Cycling Road Hazards

Adapted from "Crankers from Cooperstown: 50 Bike Rides in Upstate New York" by Dennis Savoie

You can't handle a road hazard that you don't see. Look down the road far enough to identify a road hazard in time to deal with it safely. When you identify a road hazard, glance behind to assess traffic. If the roadway is clear, alter your lane position to avoid the road hazard completely. If traffic is approaching, maintain your lane position and slow down until traffic is clear. If necessary, stop before you reach the road hazard, let traffic pass, and then deal with the hazard safely. If a road hazard is unavoidable, remember the "front wheel principle": the stability of your front wheel dictates the stability of your bike. In other words, if you safely avoid a road hazard with at least your front wheel you probably won't lose control of your bike (even if the back wheel rolls over the hazard). Remember that a motorist expects you to follow a straight and predictable line. Remember never to swerve into traffic.

1) Sand: Even a thin layer of sand on the road can result in a loss of traction when you are stopping or turning. On corners, slow down by braking before the turn and before the sand. Ride through the sandy corner as upright as possible with minimal use of the front brake (so that your front wheel remains in control). Sand on a straightway is a minor problem as long as it is not deep enough to turn your front wheel.

2) Glass: Broken glass is a common cause of flat tires. If, by chance, you do ride through glass: stop (when it's safe to do so), get off the roadway, lift and spin each wheel to wipe debris off the tires with your gloved palm.

3) Rocks, Potholes, Roadkill: Hitting any of these with your front wheel can result in loss of bike control. If because of traffic you cannot safely swerve around these hazards or ride to their left or right without significantly altering your lane position, dismount and walk around.

4) Sticks: Hitting a stick with your front wheel can result in loss of bike control. If you cannot safely avoid the stick (and it is oriented perpendicular to your direction of travel), learn to "unweigh" your front wheel (sit back and take the weight off your front wheel while being careful to keep it straight) and lift it over the stick.

5) Metal surfaces: All metal road surfaces (grates, railroad tracks, steel deck bridges, manhole covers) are slippery when wet (as are the painted lines on the road). Proceed slowly and do not brake or turn quickly.

a) Metal Grates: Metal grates for water runoff are most dangerous when their open slats are parallel to the side of the road. The slat can trap your front wheel, and send you over the handlebars. Ride to the left of all metal grates.

b) Railroad Tracks: To maintain front wheel control, cross railroad tracks at a right angle, even when they are not perpendicular to the road. If you must alter your lane position to do so, remember to first glance behind to assess traffic. In addition, railroad tracks may be elevated above the pavement surface necessitating "unweighing" your front wheel.

6) Parallel Surface Cracks and Step-Ups:

a) Parallel Surface Cracks: A long, narrow pavement crack ("step-down") running parallel to your direction of travel can catch your front wheel and cause a crash. Cross perpendicular to the crack. Remember to first glance behind to assess traffic.

b) Parallel Step-Up: At times you will be riding on a shoulder that is lower than the travel lane. To move from the shoulder leftward into the travel lane you must navigate a "step up" that can catch your front wheel and cause a crash. Cross perpendicular to the step-up. Remember to first glance behind to assess traffic.

Next Week: More Cycling Road Hazards (Dogs, Wind, Rain)

To join ORCA or to obtain more information about Bike to Work Day, May 13, call Martha Clarvoe, OCCA President, at 607-547-4020