

## **Mentoring Motorists**

**By John Duggan**

As cyclists we have all had that sudden moment of disbelief following a near miss with a car when we either think to ourselves, or more than not, shout out: “Why didn’t you see me?” While we, as cyclists, may be acutely aware of motor vehicles, we are essentially invisible to motorists.

The saying, “You can’t see what you are not looking for,” captures the cause of many bike/motor vehicle accidents. Most motorists have never received any education regarding cyclists’ use of the road and, as a result, cyclists are not on the motorists’ radar screen. For an interesting and creative public relations campaign on this point, check this [link](#).

I am often asked by intelligent non-cycling motorists regarding the legalities of cycling on the roadway. A common question goes something like this: While driving my car, a cyclist was riding on the road right in front of me even though there was an adjacent shoulder/bike lane—isn’t it illegal for the cyclist to ride in my lane when there is a marked bike lane? As cyclists we all know that the answer is generally “no” and that Washington State law ([RCW 46.61.770](#)) allows us to ride in the traffic lane, shoulder, bike lane or on the sidewalk at our option.

The problem is that non-cycling motorists are uninformed regarding “sharing the road” and this often leads to accidents, misunderstandings and hostility. Part of the problem lies in the fact that motorists in Washington State have never learned the law because, up until recently, there was nothing requiring driver education courses to teach “sharing the road.” Education is the key to promoting safer bicycle/motor vehicle interactions.

Thanks to the wonderful efforts of the Bicycle Alliance of Washington (BAW), which backed some key legislation in 2007, all driver education programs are now required to include training regarding “sharing the road” with bicycles. The provisions of the law can be found in [RCW 46.82.420](#) and [RCW 28A.220](#).

“Passing this bill is an investment in our future,” said BAW’s Acting Executive Director Dave Janis. “While it won’t make existing drivers better, it will help create a new generation of better drivers. We still need to come up with ways to improve awareness of all current drivers.”

In addition to its lobbying efforts to amend the above statutes, the BAW used funds generated from the proceeds it receives from the sales of the “Share the Road” license plates to print 100,000 copies of a Share the Road flyer targeted to motorists, and purchased 1000 Share the Road DVDs for use in driver education classes. So far, more than 3400 colorful Share the Road plates are displayed on vehicles in Washington State.

While educating existing drivers that cyclists have a right to “share the road” will be an ongoing battle, the law mandating “share the road” training for all new drivers should make the roads safer for all of us.

Of course, it does cut both ways. Cyclists must be courteous and share the road as well.

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