

Riding in New York City Traffic:

A Savvy Cyclist's Guide to the Streets

By *Andrée Sanders*

The Commerce Bank Five Boro Bike Tour provides a wonderful taste of riding in New York City. But it's just one day a year, and biking in New York City is an amazing experience all year round, uptown to downtown, East Side to West, Brooklyn to the Bronx. Biking is one of the fastest ways to get where you're going, and, believe it or not, New York is a fun place to ride.

When I first started riding in the city, I found the other traffic to be a bit intimidating. But once I learned the rules of the road, I became much more comfortable, and now I ride everywhere and even bring my kids along.

To help you become a more street-smart cyclist, here are some important rules to follow.

Rule #1: Treat Your Bike Like a Vehicle

Bicycles are categorized as vehicles in New York State, and for good reason. Bicycle-education guru John Forester explained it well with the simple statement, "Bicyclists fare best when they act like and are treated like drivers of vehicles."

You can act like a driver of a vehicle, by acting predictably. Ride in the streets—not on the sidewalks—in the direction of traffic, obeying the traffic laws just like cars and motorcyclists. Aim to be visible, including using lights at night (white in front, red on the back). Hold a steady line, rather than weaving in and out of parked cars. Don't run red lights; don't turn at no-turn signs; never ride against traffic; and always signal before making a turn or changing lanes. In short, show other users of the road that you respect the rules and deserve respect and consideration in return.

Rule #2: Know Your Place on the Road

In the United States, vehicles drive on the right side of two-way roads. While this includes cyclists, the rule is not as straightforward as it sounds. If it is a wide lane, ride on the far right, and share the lane with your fellow vehicles. Avoid the "door zone": Ride at least 4 feet away from parked cars to avoid getting hit by a car door that could open suddenly into your path.

Don't tempt motorists to squeeze too close. If the road narrows and sharing the lane side-by-side with another vehicle becomes dangerous,

or if there are obstacles or debris on the far right, be assertive and take the full lane. By doing this you communicate to drivers that they cannot pass you without changing lanes. This is the act of a confident rider.

Rule #3: Position Yourself Correctly at Intersections and When Changing Lanes

Intersections are the site of most bike-car collisions, so pay special attention to being in the correct place here. Always use the right-most lane that will take you to your destination, so as to avoid crossing other lines of traffic. To make a right turn, choose the right lane or right side of the road. To turn left, ride in the center or left side of the lane, and to go straight through, ride in the center lane. Look for signage if you are unsure.

When you are changing lanes, turning, or passing, make sure drivers can clearly see and understand your actions. First, scan the area ahead and behind you, then use hand signals to signal your intentions. Scanning is the simple act of looking over your shoulder to see if any traffic is coming. It is helpful to make eye contact with the other drivers. When all is clear, make your move.

Rule #4: Have Fun

New York is a great place to ride, and it is becoming more bike-friendly everyday. The number of cyclists on the streets keeps rising, and the City is working to make conditions friendly for us, so grab your bike and helmet and hit the road! Ride smart and have fun.



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