

Editor's Note: Bicycling as an Alternative Mode of Transportation

Air pollution caused by motor vehicles is a vexing problem for regulators. Bicycling can help reduce pollution caused by motor vehicles, and should be supported by local communities and the law. We asked some local bicycle advocates several questions about bicyclists and motor vehicles sharing the road. The general consensus was that the average cyclist might violate traffic laws out of ignorance. Better education of bicyclists and drivers of motor vehicles on traffic law and general bicycle safety can help alleviate bicycle safety problems. The article that follows is intended to provide the reader with information about the legal rights of bicyclists on the road.

Bicyclists stress their need to share roadways with cars. Aaron Livingston, founder and former chair of Sacramento Area Bicycle Advocates, summarized the importance to bicyclists of being able to share roadways, even in areas with bicycle paths. He commented that bicycle paths vary greatly in quality and safety between cities and even within the same city: "From the bicyclist's perspective, the roadway can be statistically safer than riding on an adjacent pathway....Bike trails are often not continuous and have tighter turns, more safety hazards. There are notable exceptions to the inferiority of bike trails, which occur in cities like Davis and other well planned bike 'capitals.' But these are exceptions. Virtually every destination requires a cyclist to ride or cross roads, so while bike paths are a good supplement, they are unlikely to ever be a substitute for riding on roads."

The law regarding cycling on roadways should be clear, and support and promote a cyclist's right to protect his or her own safety. Alan Wachtel's article provides a useful reference for bicyclists seeking to educate themselves on the rules governing a bicyclist's right to share the roadways with motor vehicles. He also points out areas in traffic law that need further development to best accommodate both bicyclists and motor vehicles on the road. The editors hope that the article will provoke further thought and discussion, promoting cycling as an alternate means of transportation.