



Stew's bike rules

It happened in the blink of an eye. I had worked up a good sweat and was moving at a healthy pace during the final, uphill stretch of my bike commute along the Bear Creek Path.

Emerging from an underpass, I came around the blind corner and was instantaneously struck by an incoming projectile with two wheels being misguided across my side of the path by a negligent pre-school teacher named Catherine.

The impact was direct and jarring, so much so that it took me a minute or two to become lucid enough to assess my injuries, let alone express my outrage.

"Do you see that orange line down the middle of the path?" I interrogated with rhetorical self-righteousness. "Do you know what that line is for?" I was on a roll now, but her response and the blood dripping from her hand and wrist disarmed me. "I'm sorry," she offered plaintively. "I really screwed up."

After moving our bikes and our cut and sprained limbs off the path, the energy of our interaction evolved into mutual concern and compassion. Despite her guilt, Catherine was hurt, shaken and almost in tears. I remember wanting to embrace her (Have you hugged your assailant today?), but somehow it didn't seem appropriate. We exchanged information and, once we both felt we could, continued on our ways, our days having been irrevocably altered.

During the course of the day I realized I had a deep bruise on my upper arm, a bruise on my leg, several scrapes, a sprained wrist and a sprained or broken finger. I called Catherine a few hours later to see if she was OK. She acknowledged that she had a sprained wrist and some cuts, scrapes and bruises. Still, we were lucky. A head-on bike collision could have been a lot worse.

Having logged hundreds of miles on Boulder's bike paths, I have regularly witnessed breaches of etiquette and common sense that led me to the conclusion that these ubiquitous thoroughfares are among the least safe places to ride a bike in the city. Consequently, in the spirit of increasing safety and preventing future injuries (and because I was unable to find an adequate set of rules offered by the City of Boulder), I am presenting:

Stew's Official Rules for Boulder's Shared-Use Paths

Definition of the term Shared-Use Path:

The Boulder Shared-Use Paths are "thoroughfares," not "sidewalks." A thoroughfare is a public road that is heavily traveled by multiple categories of users. A sidewalk is a paved area just for pedestrians beside a street or roadway.

Overriding principle for the use of a Shared-Use Path:

A Shared-Use Path is intended for use by pedestrians, bicyclists, roller skaters and skateboarders alike. However, as a thoroughfare, the

rules commonly associated with a road are applicable to the use of the Shared-Use Paths.

The Ten Rules of a Shared-Use Path:

1. Stay to the right. And most critically, where there is a line down the middle of the path, stay on the right side of the line. Different users move at different speeds, and those moving faster than you will need to pass you. Expect to be passed at any time and leave room for a faster-moving user to pass you safely.

2. Never occupy more than half of the path at any time. If you are in a group of four pedestrians, for example, you cannot walk four abreast and ensure your safety and the safety of others using the path. Walk in pairs so the other side of the path is open for passing as necessary. If you are walking your dog on the path, be sure your pet stays on your side of the path at all times.

3. Pass only on the left. And only pass when you can see oncoming traffic far enough down the path to ensure you have adequate time.

4. Give verbal warnings. Use the phrase "on your left" or "passing on your left" when passing.

5. Stay calm. When someone is passing you proceed normally and stay on your side (the right) of the path. The worst thing you can do is jump or react with a sudden movement when being passed.

6. Never stop on the path. If you must stop to adjust your helmet, say hello to someone or reprimand your child, move off the path and return when you are ready to continue. Remember that you're on a thoroughfare.

7. Shared-Use Paths are not the right place to teach your child to ride a bike (or roller skate, etc.). This is like taking a beginning skier to an expert slope or a novice driver on the freeway. Teach your child to ride a bike in a parking lot or on a quiet residential street before taking her to a Shared-Use Path.

8. Use hand signals. It just makes sense to let people know what you're going to do before you do it.

9. Make sure your equipment is in good working order. And be sure you know how it works and that it is the right size for your body. Never ride after dark without appropriate lights.

10. Never race. While commuters and those biking or skating to achieve specific levels of cardio-vascular exercise have every right to go as fast as the speed limits allow, racing on a Shared-Use Path is, by definition, reckless.

For more information (albeit mainstream) on the rules of the road and trail for bicycling and walking in Colorado, check out the Dept. of Transportation's "Colorado Bicycling Manual" at the following website:

<http://www.dor.state.co.us/BikePed/BikePedManual.htm>

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