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New Bike Law Protects Local Cyclists

By Sophie Braccini



Photo Andy Scheck

Local bike groups and law enforcement agencies believe the new law will reduce the number of incidents involving these types of vehicles.

"This is an important step in protecting cyclists and making sure their rights will be respected," says Brad Crane of BikeLafayette - a new Sustainable Lafayette group that aims to bring bicyclists of all ages, abilities and interest together to encourage and celebrate cycling. "Now the police will have something to enforce. This will hopefully increase the level of safety and respect bicycles get from cars."

Crane says most motorists in Lamorinda are very courteous with bicyclists and give them the right of way, but there are still some dangerous situations on large arterials, when cars and trucks are moving fast, and sometimes vehicles make right turns without seeing bicycles coming up the bike lane. "There is a gray area between motorists and cyclists and how they merge and behave at stop signs," he says. "There is still a need for more rules to protect bicyclists involved in incidents with motorists." He believes motorists who injure or even sometimes kill a bicyclist are often not prosecuted if the event is classified as an incident and not a violation.

The new state law will be enforced only if an officer observes an infringement.

"Only if an officer sees the infraction, can he file a violation," says Priebe. The fine is set at \$35, but Priebe warns that county and state taxes are added to that amount. If a bicyclist is injured in a collision, and the driver is in violation of the Three Feet for Safety Act, the fine rises to \$220. Priebe also reminds bicyclists that they should be following the same rules as other vehicles: stopping at stop signs, obeying traffic lights, and riding on the right side of the road.

For specific information about the Three Feet for Safety Act, visit <http://www.dmv.ca.gov/pubs/vctop/d11/vc21760.htm>.

With Lamorinda's hilly terrain, certain roads can be difficult for drivers to navigate, but these roads can go from tricky to treacherous when motorists share them with bicyclists. "We've had some serious conflicts with the large number of bicyclists on Canyon Road," says Moraga Chief of Police Bob Priebe. "Unfortunately conflicts between cyclists and motorists sometimes become serious, and we've had a car push a bicyclist off the road."

Last week California Gov. Jerry Brown signed the Three Feet for Safety Act that requires motorists to pass a bicycle at a distance of no less than 3 feet, and states that if a motorist does not have enough space to pass the bicycle due to traffic or roadway conditions, the driver should slow to a speed that is reasonable and prudent, and may pass only when doing so will not endanger the safety of the cyclist.

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