



Pedestrian and Bicyclist Rights and Responsibilities

Minnesota law specifies how different types of traffic should behave when traveling throughout the state.¹ The ability of pedestrians and bicyclists to safely and effectively travel is dependent on all forms of traffic understanding and following these laws.

How does Minnesota law impact bicyclists and pedestrians?

Minnesota law creates specific rights and responsibilities of different transportation users that create order and predictability in how different types of traffic move and interact throughout the transportation system. These rights and responsibilities are important safety features to protect bicyclists and pedestrians from accidents and injuries.

Responsibilities of certain transportation users create rights that benefit other transportation users.

What types of rights & responsibilities does Minnesota law identify that impact bicyclists and pedestrians?

Minnesota law generally identifies the following rights and responsibilities that impact bicyclists and pedestrians:

- Vehicle Driver Rights & Responsibilities

Minnesota law defines “traffic” to include not only motor vehicles but also pedestrians, bicyclists, horseback riders, and others using the road for transportation.²



- Motor Vehicle Driver Rights & Responsibilities
- Bicyclist Rights & Responsibilities
- Pedestrian Rights & Responsibilities

Minnesota law defines “vehicle” broadly to include almost anything that can be used for transportation on a roadway, including a bicycle.³

Vehicle Driver Rights & Responsibilities

Minnesota’s traffic regulations apply to the operation of all vehicles on Minnesota roads. For this reason, the vast majority of rights and responsibilities that apply to “vehicles” also apply to both motor vehicle drivers and bicyclists traveling on the road.

- Where traffic control signals are not in place or operation, vehicle drivers must stop to yield to a pedestrian crossing the road at all marked crosswalks and intersections with unmarked crosswalks. The driver must remain stopped until the pedestrian has passed the lane in which the vehicle is stopped.⁴
- Vehicle drivers must:
 - Be careful to avoid colliding with any bicyclist or pedestrian upon any roadway;
 - Give an audible signal when necessary; and
 - Be especially careful when any child or obviously confused or incapacitated person is on a roadway.⁵
- Vehicle drivers emerging from an alley, driveway, or building must stop immediately before driving onto a sidewalk or into the sidewalk area and allow pedestrians and all other traffic on the sidewalk to pass before driving further.⁶
- Vehicle drivers must stop at any intersection of any street, avenue, alley, or other public highway

to allow the following persons to pass before driving further:

- A blind pedestrian carrying a white or metallic cane, or using a service dog, or
 - A deaf person with a service dog (identified with a burnt orange collar or leash).⁷
- Vehicle drivers at a railroad crossing when a signal warns of an approaching railroad train or when a railroad train is visible, must:
 - Stop at least ten feet away from the nearest railroad track, and
 - Not cross over the track until:
 - It is safe to do so, and
 - The roadway is clear of traffic so that the vehicle can cross over without stopping until the rear of the vehicle is at least ten feet past the other side of the railroad track.⁸

Motor Vehicle Driver Rights & Responsibilities

- Motor vehicle drivers are prohibited from driving through a group of school children crossing a road or driving past a member of a school safety patrol or adult crossing guard while the patrol or crossing guard is directing the children across a road and/or holding an official signal in the stop position.⁹
- Motor vehicle drivers must drive with care and reduce speed when approaching intersections.¹⁰
- Motor vehicle drivers cannot pull a toboggan, hand sled, bicycle, or other similar device while driving on a highway.¹¹
- Motor vehicle drivers (and passengers) are prohibited from:
 - Opening any door on a motor vehicle unless and until it is reasonably safe to do so and can be done without interfering with the movement of other traffic, including bicyclists; and

- Keeping open any door on the side of a vehicle next to moving traffic for longer than is necessary to load or unload passengers.¹²

Under Minnesota law, a bicycle is a type of vehicle, meaning bicyclists have the same general rights and responsibilities as motorists and must obey all traffic regulations that apply to vehicles.¹³

Bicyclist Rights & Responsibilities

- Bicyclists traveling on the road must ride in the same direction as the traffic closest to the bicyclist.¹⁴
- Bicyclists traveling on the road must ride as close as possible to the right-hand edge of the roadway, except when:
 - Passing another vehicle travelling in the same direction;
 - Preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway;
 - Reasonably necessary to avoid conditions that make it unsafe to continue along the right-hand edge of the roadway, such as fixed or moving objects, vehicles, pedestrians, animals, surface hazards, or narrow width lanes; or
 - Riding on the shoulder of a roadway or in a bicycle lane.¹⁵
- Bicyclists lawfully operating a bicycle on a sidewalk, or across a roadway or shoulder on a crosswalk, generally have all the rights and responsibilities as pedestrians under the same circumstances.¹⁶
- Bicyclists are generally prohibited from riding on sidewalks in business districts and other marked areas.¹⁷
- Bicyclists lawfully operating a bicycle on sidewalks, roads, or crosswalks must not interrupt a pedestrian's path of travel and must say something or make some sort of noise (like ringing a bell) to signal when approaching or passing a pedestrian.¹⁸
- Bicyclists traveling on the road must use arm signals 100 feet before making a lane change or turn, unless the arm is needed to control the bicycle, and must use the arm signal while stopped and waiting to turn.¹⁹
 - A left turn is represented by the left hand and arm extended horizontally.
 - A right turn is represented by the left hand and arm extended upward or the right hand and arm extended horizontally.





Bicyclists and pedestrians are allowed on all roads and highways in Minnesota unless specifically prohibited.²⁰ For example, both pedestrians and bicyclists are prohibited on interstate highways.²¹

- Bicyclists are required to use proper safety equipment, including reflective gear and brakes.²²
- Bicyclists on state recreational trails must allow a motor vehicle using the trail to access the main road to pass first.²³
- Bicyclists on a bikeway must leave a safe distance when passing another bicyclist or individual proceeding in the same direction on the bikeway, and not move back over until safely past.²⁴
- Bicyclists are prohibited from having more persons on their bicycle at one time than the number for

which the bicycle is designed and equipped. An adult bicyclist may carry a child in a seat designed for carrying children that is securely attached to the bicycle.²⁵

- Bicyclists are prohibited from attaching themselves or their bicycle to a vehicle or street car to be towed along.²⁶
- Bicyclists are prohibited from carrying a package or bundle that prevents them from keeping at least one hand on the handlebars to steer and brake.²⁷

Pedestrian Rights & Responsibilities

- Pedestrians must follow traffic control signals at all intersections.²⁸
- Pedestrians who begin to cross a road when no vehicles are present have the right to continue to

cross the entire road and have approaching vehicles stop to yield to them at all marked crosswalks and intersections with unmarked crosswalks.²⁹

- Both blind pedestrians carrying a white or metallic cane or using a service dog and deaf pedestrians with a service dog (identified with a burnt orange collar or leash) have the right to cross before other traffic at any intersection of any street, avenue, alley, or other public highway.³⁰
- Pedestrians must always exercise care for their own safety even when they have the right of way.³¹
- Pedestrians are prohibited from suddenly leaving a curb or other place of safety and walking or running into the path of a vehicle which is so close that it is impossible for the driver to stop.³²
- Pedestrians who cross between intersections with working signals must use the crosswalk when available.³³
- Pedestrians who cross a roadway at any location other than within a marked crosswalk or at an intersection with no marked crosswalk must allow traffic in the roadway to pass first before crossing.³⁴
- Pedestrians must use sidewalks, where available, rather than a roadway.³⁵
- Pedestrians must travel on the left hand side of the road (or its shoulder) against traffic when it is safe and practical - and there are no accessible or usable sidewalks.³⁶
- Pedestrians are prohibited from soliciting rides, money, employment, or other business from motor vehicle drivers.³⁷
- Pedestrians are prohibited from:
 - Passing through, around, over, or under any crossing gate or barrier at a railroad grade crossing while the gate or barrier is closed or is being opened or closed; or
 - Entering, standing, or crossing over a railroad track, grade crossing, or pedestrian walkway crossing a railroad track when a bell or clearly visible signal is warning of a railroad train.³⁸
- Pedestrians are prohibited from traveling or entering a railroad track, yard, or bridge without permission. Anyone who does so is trespassing and is guilty of a misdemeanor.³⁹

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Endnotes

¹ See generally, MINN. STAT. §§ 169.

² See MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 84.

³ See MINN. STAT. § 169.011, subd. 92.

- ⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(a).
- ⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 3(d); *see also*, *Kachman v. Blosberg*, 251 Minn. 224, 231, 87 N.W.2d 687 (Minn. 1958).
- ⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.31.
- ⁷ MINN. STAT. §§ 256C.03, 169.202, subd. 2.
- ⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.26, subd. 1.
- ⁹ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(c).
- ¹⁰ *Staloch v. Belsaas*, 136 N.W.2d 92, 100 (Minn. 1965).
- ¹¹ MINN. STAT. § 169.46.
- ¹² MINN. STAT. § 169.315.
- ¹³ *See* MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 1.
- ¹⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(b).
- ¹⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(a).
- ¹⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(f).
- ¹⁷ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(d).
- ¹⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(d).
- ¹⁹ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 8.
- ²⁰ *See generally*, MINN. STAT. §§ 160, 169.
- ²¹ MINN. R. 8810.0050.
- ²² MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 6.
- ²³ *Stewart v. Koenig*, 783 N.W.2d 164, 168 (Minn. 2010).
- ²⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 4(e).
- ²⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 2.
- ²⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 3.
- ²⁷ MINN. STAT. § 169.222, subd. 5.
- ²⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 1.
- ²⁹ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(a).
- ³⁰ MINN. STAT. §§ 256C.03, 169.202, subd. 2.
- ³¹ *See* *Kachman v. Blosberg*, 251 Minn. 224, 233-34, 87 N.W.2d 687 (Minn. 1958).
- ³² MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 2(a).
- ³³ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 3(c).
- ³⁴ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 3(a).
- ³⁵ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 5.
- ³⁶ MINN. STAT. § 169.21, subd. 5.
- ³⁷ MINN. STAT. § 169.22.
- ³⁸ MINN. STAT. § 169.26, subd. 4.
- ³⁹ MINN. STAT. § 609.85, subd. 6.