

Bicycle Friendly Utah!

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Utah Bicycle Accident Attorney Jackie Carmichael sends a report on her state's efforts for better biking.

By Jackie Carmichael, [Bike Law Utah](#)

[As a bicycle accident lawyer in Salt Lake City](#), I am happy to report that the State of Utah, and the metropolitan area of Salt Lake City in particular, has made an enormous effort to create a community that is bicycle-friendly and that provides the necessary infrastructure to support city-wide cycling as a way to commute as well as for recreation.

Utah recognizes and supports the cycling movement and has created several administrative bodies to help promote safe cycling throughout the state. Two such groups include [Bike Utah](#) and [Bike SLC](#). Both groups' websites provide information about bike routes/maps, safety tips, and how to become involved as a cyclist in the community.

Bike Utah sponsors a "Road Respect Tour" that includes several rides throughout the state of Utah during the months of May and June. The purpose of the Tour is to "encourage safe cycling and to promote positive interactions between bicyclists and drivers." The Tour is sponsored by Bike Utah, the Utah Department of Transportation, the Department of Public Safety, the Utah Highway Patrol, and Zero Fatalities. Such wide-spread support for the Tour demonstrates Utah's commitment to the cycling movement as well as its desire to keep cyclists safe and educate drivers so that accidents and fatalities can be avoided.

In addition to these groups, Utah also has its own [Bicycle Collective](#). This group's mission statement is to "promote cycling as an effective and sustainable form of transportation and as a cornerstone of a cleaner, healthier, and safer society." The Collective focuses on children and lower income households and raises money to provide educational programs and refurbished bicycles to the community. Along these same lines is the Salt Lake City bike-share program called [Green Bike](#). For a small membership fee, people can share a network of bicycles at various locations throughout the city. This too promotes cycling in our community.

The Utah Department of Transportation is also actively involved in supporting and promoting the cycling movement. U-DOT has published a comprehensive "Utah Bicycle Commuter Guide" called "Share the Road—An introduction to the Fun and Rewarding Art of Bicycle Commuting." This pdf file found on [UDOT's website](#) contains a wealth of information for cyclists including such topics as Bicycle Basics, Outfitting your Bicycle, Outfitting Yourself, Riding Safely and Legally, Safety Checks, Bicycle Related Utah Code (laws) to name

a few.

Finally, Utah law enforcement has also made an effort to educate its officers with respect to bicycle safety and published the "Bicycle Safety Enforcement Action Guidelines." The stated objective of these [Guidelines](#) is to "make roads safer for bicyclists and other road users and to decrease the number of bicyclists killed and injured each year by reducing the bicycle/motor vehicle crashes." In order to accomplish these objectives, the Guidelines focus on 3 major areas including (1) improving compliance with traffic laws relating to bicycle safety through education and enforcement efforts; (2) identifying and correcting violator and repeat violator behavior; and (3) raising awareness and educating the public on how motorists and bicyclists can safely share the road, by distributing educational materials, and through the media.

In spite of these great and varied efforts to promote safety and bicycle awareness throughout our Utah communities, we still see a significant number of accidents and fatalities each year. There also continues to be an attitude among some motorists that cyclists should not be on the roadway. An example of this attitude is found in [a recent article in the Salt Lake Tribune](#) where the reporter recounted the story of a cyclist who was intentionally cut-off by a motorist 3 times before the motorist pulled over and told the cyclist that he needed to get off the road. When the cyclist explained that he had a right to use the roadway, the motorist assaulted him by striking him on the head. This type of anti-cyclist, anti-share-the-road, attitude can result in motor vehicle to bicycle collisions that cause serious injury and even death.

In light of all that our community has done to educate the public, promote bicycle safety and further the cycling movement, we still see a significant number of auto-bike collisions each year. In the article referenced above, it was reported that the Salt Lake area saw 1,193 auto-bike collisions during a 5 year period ending last year. That's an average of 239 auto-bicycle crashes per year. When you consider all that our community is doing to promote bicycle awareness and safety and provide adequate infrastructure so that cyclists can safely share the road with motorists, one might ask what more can be done to decrease the number of car to cyclist collisions?

Becka Roof, Salt Lake City bicycle and pedestrian coordinator, has a very interesting answer to that question. [In her interview with the Salt Lake Tribune](#), she suggested that adding more cyclists will decrease the number of accidents that occur: "The way to make cycling safer is to get more people on bicycles." In explaining this seemingly counter-intuitive position, Roof pointed out that "with more bikes everyone—drivers, cyclists, even pedestrians—are more aware of one another. Awareness heightens safety and encourages still greater numbers to give biking a try." Another excellent solution is for our city to incorporate "protected bike lanes", lanes that are entirely separated from motorist traffic. According to research conducted by Utah cycling groups, this solution has worked well in many other cities worldwide.

There is no question that Utah is a very bicycle-friendly state that is dedicated to the cycling movement and the development of the necessary infrastructure to provide cyclists with safe passage. It has been reported that

Salt Lake City alone has 211 miles of bike lanes, with plans to continue to design roads with all users in mind which will include the addition of separate "protected" bike lanes in the future.

With all of these objectives and goals in place, I am optimistic that Utah will not only be known as a bicycle-friendly state, but will someday very soon become known as the "safest place to ride" as well.

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