

L.A. Streetsblog: Cycling and the Law: Where Does Education Begin?

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by Sarah Goodyear on May 6, 2009



What's the law where you are? Photo by tandemracer via Flickr.

Today, in honor of [bike month](#) on the [Streetsblog Network](#), we hear from a cyclist in Long Beach, California, who was forced into the position of (unsuccessfully) educating a police officer about the right of a bike to ride safely out of the door zone. This via the [Long Beach Cyclists blog](#):

Middle of the day. Hardly any traffic and I just got pulled over for not riding on the "right side." I'm no racer but 15mph on 2nd Street isn't going that much slower than car traffic through there.

I tried to explain to the officer that any closer and I would be in the "door zone." He seemed nonplussed.

I cited the vehicle code and told him that it said I was to ride to the right as "practicable" which is a big difference than "possible", because it was up to me to determine if there were any hazards. He didn't seem to care.

I told him that I was riding exactly where the new sharrows would be on 2nd street in a few months. The new wha? I don't see them

now.

*I was holding him up. Although I was on the right travel lane and he was on the left and he wanted me to know about it...
I'm about as law-abiding a cyclist as you can get in Long Beach. I ride in the correct direction of traffic. I don't ride on the sidewalk. One of the first things I keep trying to advocate for is that we have to educate the enforcement on the laws regarding bicycling. Maybe NOW might be a good time to start.*

Given the rising number of commuting and recreational cyclists in [New York](#) and [elsewhere](#) around the country, and the welter of conflicting laws in different states and municipalities, education of law enforcement (as well as drivers and cyclists) on cyclists' rights and responsibilities would seem to be an obvious area for police departments to focus on.

But does anyone know of municipalities where this is actually happening in an organized way?

Bonus from [bike lawyer Bob Mionske's "Road Rights"](#) column: [a story](#) about an encounter between two cyclists and a cop on a rural Ohio road in which a disagreement about the letter of the law escalated into violence; and [a thoughtful response](#) from a cop who is also a cyclist, and who says, "Bike-friendly communities around the county were 'built on sugar, not salt,' as they say in the South. They took time, planning and folks willing to do the right thing; forcing legislation probably won't get us anywhere. You can make a law but if it's unpopular, enforcing it is something else, à la prohibition."