

The effect of lane position and riding abreast on cyclist conspicuity and motorist decision making

On 8/4/2013 at Camp Pendleton, California, these three cyclists were hit by a bus, three seconds after this image of them was captured by the bus' dashboard camera. Two of them were seriously injured, and the third, Udo Heinz, was killed.

<https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/sdut-cyclist-killed-pendleton-crash-heinz-2013aug09-story.html>



Image from bus dashboard camera

The following image was computer-modified to show how the cyclists would have appeared had they been riding in the middle of the narrow lane instead of at its edge. Note their much improved visibility. Controlling a narrow lane is legal in all states for just this reason.



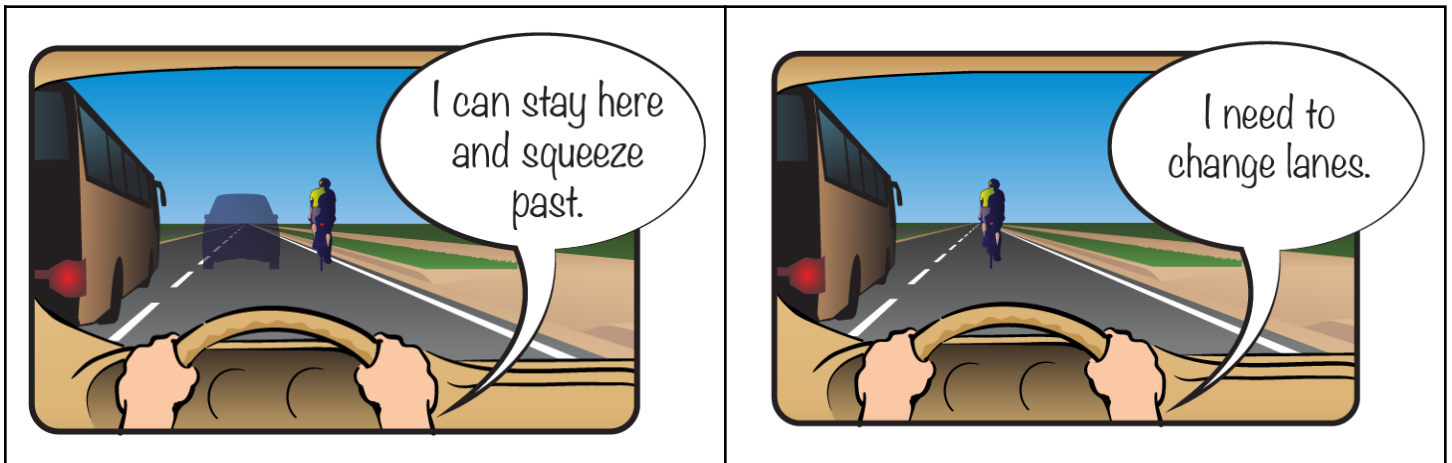
Image modified by Serge Issakov

The following computer-modified image shows how the group would have looked had two of them been riding two-abreast. Note the additional visibility improvement over single file riding.



Image modified by John Brooking

When the law allows a cyclist in a narrow lane situation (among others) to take any lane position they decide is safest, that law applies equally to all cyclists in a group. When a motor vehicle approaches from the rear, the group *may* choose to single up to facilitate passing, *if* passing would be safe at that time. On the other hand, that may also hinder passing by lengthening the line of cyclists to be passed. In either case, riding two abreast by default helps to ensure that drivers of overtaking motor vehicles see the cyclists sooner, must consider more carefully whether it is safe to pass, and also gives the cyclists an opportunity to evaluate that for themselves in each situation.



Illustrations by Keri Caffrey

The screen shots on the next page are from a free video by the national cycling education curriculum CyclingSavvy (CyclingSavvy.org).

Key considerations for cycling in a narrow (12 foot) lane

A car won't fit here



At least 3 ft of passing clearance

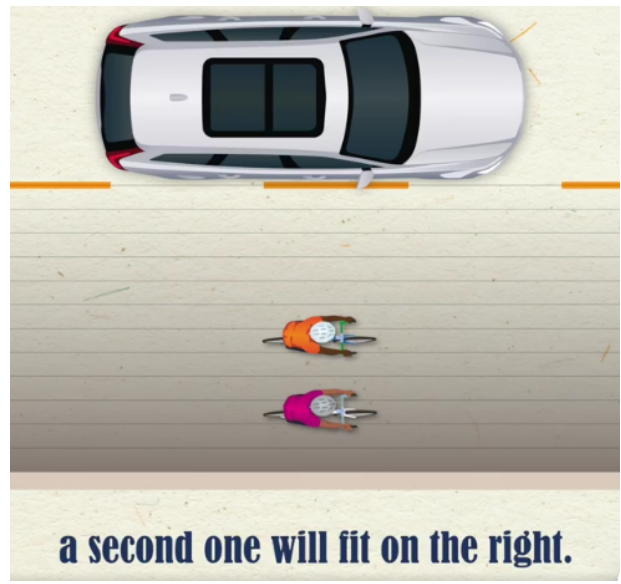
Bicyclists need 4 ft of operating space



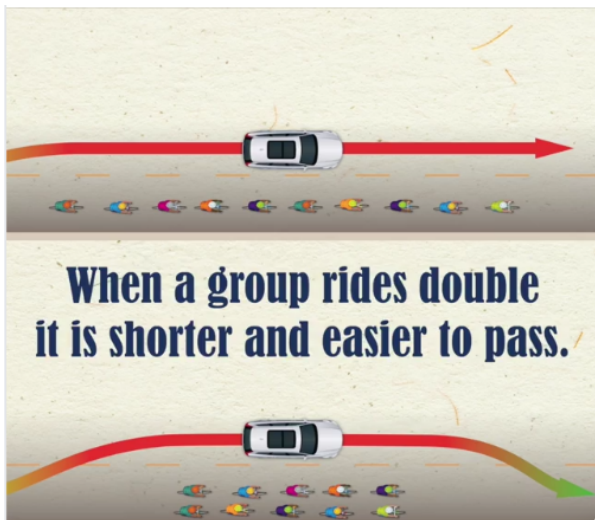
To make clear the car won't fit a solo rider rides farther left.



If one cyclist is in this safe position...



a second one will fit on the right.



When a group rides double it is shorter and easier to pass.

Document created by
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Senator Diamond, Repr. Martin, and committee members,

I write somewhat belatedly to express my hope that you will vote that LD 1230, which would create a requirement for cyclists to ride single file when being passed by a motor vehicle, OUGHT NOT to pass.

The attached brief document conveys the core of my argument, but I will state here that the bottom line is this law would NOT accomplish the increase in road safety its proponents hope it will. It's just not that simple. Single file riding creates an assumption that there is room to pass, which may not always be the case. Riding abreast makes the group more visible sooner, prompts motorists to be more cautious around them, and can make the group easier to pass by creating a shorter line. A long single file line would make it HARDER to complete a pass safely, and sometimes impossible to know ahead of time whether a safe pass is possible.

I speak as a 18-year bicycle commuter and certified safety educator. Please reject this proposal. It's bad for all road users. Thank you for your consideration.