



Please Be Kind to Cyclists Research Survey: The Motorist/Bicyclist Dynamic

According to a report by the National Highway Transportation Safety Administration (NHTSA), 726 bicyclists were killed and 49,000 were injured in motor vehicle-related crashes in the United States in 2012 . That makes up 2.2% of all motor vehicle-related deaths in the nation; and of that 2.2%, the state of Texas is 3rd behind California and Florida with 56 bicyclists killed by a motor vehicle. As cycling popularity continues to grow, these statistics may unfortunately increase in future years unless something is done to create awareness and educate the public about the burgeoning safety concerns among cyclists and motorists.

The Texas Transportation Code states, “A person operating a bicycle has the rights and duties applicable to a driver operating a vehicle...” This code clearly states that in Texas, bicyclists have a right to be on the roadways, yet it appears that motorists and cyclists share confusion and are disconnected from understanding each other and each other’s rights and duties on the road around each other. As such, GDC Marketing & Ideation (GDC) on behalf of Please Be Kind to Cyclists (PBKTC), distributed a national online survey (but with majority focus in the greater Austin area) among the general public. The survey yielded 1,321 completes (margin of error +/- 2.7 at .95 confidence level). Additionally, GDC conducted 3 focus groups that targeted the following 3 segments: 1) Traffic and Safety Specialists and Law Enforcement, 2) Teen Drivers and non-drivers, and 3) The General Public (adults who currently have a driver’s license). In many cases the data validated some preconceived notions regarding motorist and bicyclist sentiments for one another, but they also revealed new elements within the dynamic.

The survey validated an understanding that there are many recognized cyclist “types”. From neighborhood riders (i.e., families and kids typically riding in neighborhoods) to marathoners (i.e., long distance riders possibly in teams who typically ride on rural roads and areas outside the center of town) to professionals (i.e., couriers and delivery riders who typically ride in high traffic areas) and commuters (i.e., regular to everyday riders who typically ride to get around, run errands, etc.); all of these cyclist “types” (and more) have different levels of cycling experience, ways of riding, and knowledge of the rules of the road and state and city laws and ordinances.

Along those same lines, motorists also have different levels of driving experience, ways of driving, and knowledge of cyclists and motorists’ rules of the road and state and city laws and ordinances. As a result, many motorists do not know how to appropriately interact with cyclists when they encounter them on the roadways. This ambiguity is exacerbated by a general lack of knowledge from both motorists and cyclists regarding the laws each is expected to follow.

1 Traffic Safety Facts 2012: A Compilation of Motor Vehicle Crash Data from the Fatality Analysis Reporting System and the General Estimates System. NHTSA: U.S. Department of Transportation, 2012.

2 Transportation Code Title 7: Vehicles in Traffic. Subtitle C: Rules of the Road, Chapter 551: Operation of Bicycles, Mopeds and Play Vehicles, 101: Rights and Duties. Web address: <http://www.statutes.legis.state.tx.us/docs/tn/htm/tn.551.htm>, Accessed June 11, 2014.

These variables, plus a sense of entitlement in both motorists and cyclists, that is, the belief in both that they have the exclusive right to be on the road, plus motorists’ belief that there is a double standard wherein cyclists ride with impunity and go unpunished for breaking the law – all of these factors add up to confusion and misunderstanding on the road.

Research shows that these variables are key causes in generating emotions of anxiety, fear, frustration and anger from both motorists and cyclists, and have thus created this disconnect in their communication and overall understanding of each other. Table 1 below outlines these sentiments more thoroughly.

Motorists	Cyclists
Are commonly distracted by things (e.g., cell phones, radio, make up, etc.)	Do not obey the laws of the road (e.g., run red lights, stop signs, ride on sidewalks, etc.)→ Ride with impunity
Are impatient and in too much of a rush (e.g., trying to get from one place to another too quickly)	Slow down traffic (e.g., ride side by side, use full motorist lane, do not pull over to let motorists pass)
Do not consider the vulnerability of a bicyclist	Do not wear proper clothing (e.g., bright shirts) and use proper equipment (e.g., head and tail lights)
Not as open to sharing the road: Sense of entitlement → roads were originally built for motorists	Sharing the road not reciprocated: Sense of entitlement → The law says they have a right to be there so they take up space without concern for motorists

Table 1: Primary Reasons for Frustration and Anger among Motorists and Cyclists

A survey participant sums up cyclists’ sentiments about motorists best:

Obeying laws, sharing the road, and recognizing that what would otherwise be a small fender-bender can send a cyclist to the hospital, or worse. Cyclists have families too.

Cyclists apparently know that motorists have to use the roadways, yet they remain frustrated when motorists ignore them and do not yield to their right of way while riding. Furthermore, cyclists realize that they themselves are highly vulnerable to injury since they do not have a body of metal around them to protect them; therefore the level of anxiety for cyclists is high. Additionally, cyclists would like to be recognized according to individual actions rather than as a group entity since many believe they are being condemned as a cyclist as a result of one or a few individual cyclist’s mistakes.

On the flipside, this motorist summed up a repeated sentiment about cyclists:

The “Share the Road” slogan works both ways. I have no problem with a law-abiding cyclist out doing the healthy thing and riding. It’s when I watch them run through red lights and stop signs, cut throughout stopped cars at lights and then get in front of them when the light turns green, or generally disregard the laws of the road that I get frustrated. I feel the same about drivers that do those things but where the cars have license plates to call in, the cyclists have no repercussions to their actions.

Aligned with these comments, the survey data suggest that approximately 70% of motorists actually feel okay or are not really bothered with cyclists riding on roadways (see Chart 1). However, the level of anxiety for motorists is equally present. The qualitative data further support this as many motorists state that they experience anxiety while driving out of fear that they might injure a cyclist.

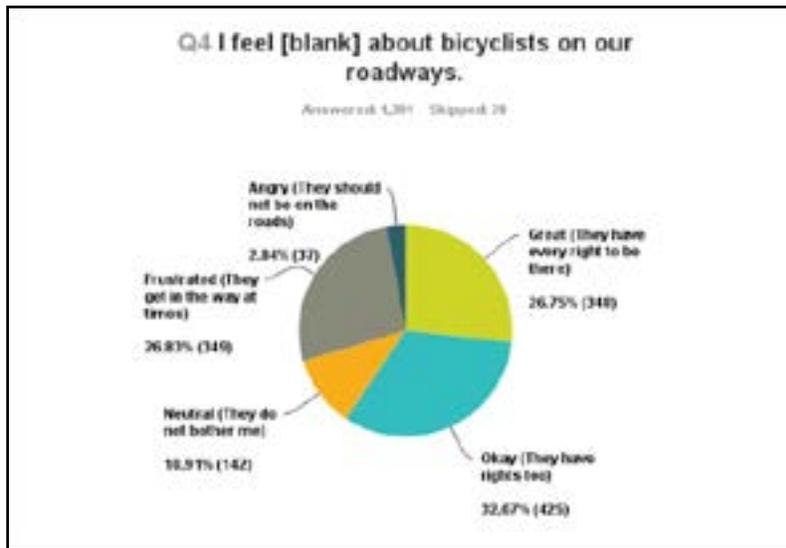


Chart 1: Motorist sentiment about bicyclists on roadways

Summary

It is evident that the issues motorists and cyclists have with one another are problematic and the disconnection in mutual understanding is present. While many motorists are generally unbothered by bicyclists, there are still close to 30% who find themselves frustrated and angry when they encounter them. As such, greater awareness efforts are needed among motorists to help generate the respect motorists and cyclists need to remain safe on our roadways. Increased understanding of cyclist's vulnerability -- a trait they all share on the road, should be paramount to any outreach efforts to motorists.

This survey was focused on providing information about motorists' beliefs in order to generate awareness and help motorists in driver education classes to know how to drive safely around cyclists.

However, as is the case with most dynamic relationships, communication within and between both groups is key to creating this awareness and assisting motorists and cyclists in sharing the road and being kind to one another in the process. The data confirms an understanding of the need to also generate awareness in cyclists to assist them in understanding their practices as well as the perspectives of the motorist. That is not to say that unaware or even aggressive motorist behavior is justified due to particular motorist's sentiments, rather, it is to present the idea that both motorists and cyclists must put each other in the other's proverbial shoes to gain greater humanistic perspective of each other. This mutual perspective conveyed in curriculum will generate the enhanced understanding and thus greater respect that is necessary to keep cyclists and motorists safe on our roadways.

By understanding the complicated dynamic that motorists and cyclists share we are a step further in our attempts to generate awareness, respect, and safety for cyclists throughout the world.

This survey was conducted by Dr. Timothy C. Craig of GDC Marketing & Ideation in May 2014 for the Please Be Kind to Cyclists grant DriveKind RideKind. If you have questions or comments about the survey, please direct them to info@drivekindridekind.org



Please BE KIND to Cyclists members work with cyclists, motorists, policy-makers, and community members to raise awareness and promote mutual respect between drivers and cyclists on the road, creating healthier and more harmonious communities.



Save a Life™
Texas Department of Transportation

The **TxDOT Traffic Operations Division** has developed safety campaigns to raise awareness about safe driving, sharing the road, ensuring the safety of kids and teens, and traveling in inclement weather, among others.