

ENTITLED, AN ACT RELATING TO MOTOR AND OTHER VEHICLES --

OPERATION OF BICYCLES {LC56/1} (Requires anyone using a bicycle trail or path to stay to the right on the path and would always pass on the left when safe to do so.) BY  
Speakman, Spears

01/24/2025 Introduced, referred to House State Government & Elections

04/18/2025 Scheduled for hearing and/or consideration

There is an ongoing problem on the RI bike paths:

Pedestrians walk left, facing oncoming bicycles who are on the right. The rationale is that the pedestrian wants to see the oncoming bicycle. The flaw is that there is no instruction on what to do about this face-to-face pedestrian-to-bicycle situation.

Result: A bicycle can face a roadblock on the bikepath – a pedestrian and a bicycle side-by-side heading towards them. The only workable solution is the pedestrian must step off the bikepath. But there is no instruction in place to deal with this. With this lack of instruction, head-on accidents happen. I have observed such a thing. The obvious solution is what works in every other US state: Everyone travels on the right, and anyone who wants to pass simply slows down and waits for safe passage. No one steps off the path. Simple, all movement on the right, faster traffic pass left when safe.

It is easier to leave things the way they have been. This rule with questionable reasoning pushes against research, statistics and, public/personal safety. Yet this is a big ask for those who walk the paths. People walking deserve to be safer and have less conflict. If this is passed this transition would require efforts by pedestrians, media campaigns and public safety support.

Research – A 20-year-old document retrieved from DEM shows unanimous recommendations that all movement on bike paths should be on the right. More recently a query of certified bike instructors, out of state bike advocates and traffic engineers resulted in near unanimous endorsement of all movement on the right being the safest alternative.

Statistics – All other states and countries with drive to the right rules have all movement on a bike path on the right. All movement on the right offers a uniform predictability. An all movement on the right minimizes regular confrontation. With simultaneous left/right movement challenges for the same space abound. Courtesy is diminished for a false sense of security and safety. Bike riders in an all on the right environment, need to slow down and wait for safe passing opportunities.

Safety – Riding in Rhode island presents the problem of a movable closed gate. The movable gate can be a couple walking quickly on the left as a bikes moves slowly in the same direction on the right. On coming people on bikes, walking or anything in between must leave the path or force another to be displaced. Confrontation in the world happens. Supporting uniform movement on the right diminishes confrontation. I regularly bike in and around Bethesda. Week day volume on the bike paths down there is heavier than weekend volume in RI. Yet the ease of flow is enhanced by the predictability of knowing where everyone is and will be. Passage of this law would mean improved path etiquette. Tourists, those resettled in RI and google AI, all endorse stay right on bike paths. Please consider the payoff in focus on bikes. The switch to join the rest of biking world on the right could lead to momentum for other active transportation considerations and training. Please consider this change as movement forward. It is a little thing that is asking many many people to change their habit.

Change is good. Respectfully submitted,

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