

## **HSCP Cycle Rides: ride guidance**

These guidelines are intended to improve participants' safety and enjoyment of the HSCP Cycle Rides. They are:

- presented in no particular order,
  - not intended to comprise a complete set in any sense,
  - not substitutes for the rules of the Highway Code,
  - not hard-and-fast rules of the HSCP Cycle Rides, despite their phrasing here as direct instructions, and
  - formed in consideration of only the HSCP Cycle Rides, so may not be followed by other organised cycle groups.
- Some of the guidelines are further explained by notes provided on page 3.

1. **Set your mobile phone to silent** before moving off. Do this for notifications and alarms as well as incoming calls and messages.
2. While cycling, **don't let good conversation with other cyclists overtake your continuous awareness** of hazards on or beside the road, traffic oncoming or behind, turn-offs and junctions approaching, the positioning of other cyclists around you, instructions barked by the group leader, etc.  
Do immediately interrupt conversation to flag hazards to others.
3. **Point at significant potholes, road subsidence, well-sunken verges, unexpected surface gravel or sand, obstructive low-height road furniture, etc.**, as you cycle past them, to warn the cyclists behind.
4. **Check behind before braking to stop, and before moving out to pass parked vehicles or to overtake other cyclists or to cycle two-abreast, and before signalling to turn** (yes, even for turning left).
5. **Don't wave-through drivers behind**, even if the lane for oncoming traffic appears clear ahead.  
(There are rare exceptions which only the group leader should exercise, often involving temporary traffic lights.)
6. Even on roads with two or more lanes, **when drivers behind are waiting for an opportunity to overtake, drop into single-file** (unless safeguarding a nervous or struggling cyclist).  
And **stay in single-file on all busy roads and all fast roads with regular traffic** (with the same exception). In our locality, but not necessarily others, this includes all A-roads and all B-roads.
7. **Every participant should know, at all times, whether they are in front of or behind the group leader.**  
If you're in front of the group leader (allowed on HSCP Cycle Rides but probably not in other cycling groups), your default action should be to **wait at the next public-road turn-off or junction for the group to catch up**, even if you know the route. There are three exceptions (see the corresponding note on page 3).  
Obviously, don't cycle in advance of the group leader if they've said to stay behind or to "follow me".
8. **If you become detached from the group, follow the *detachment protocol*** (see page 2).
9. **Don't forget to look around you to enjoy the sights and scenery** even during conversation, and do interrupt conversation to point out pretty or interesting stuff! Such interruptions should not be considered rude in this scenario, as sights last for only seconds when whizzing past them, but convos can shortly be returned to.
10. (General cycling advice, not specific to cycling in groups) **Don't cycle closer to the kerb/verge to attempt to make space for drivers to overtake you within the same lane as you.** This may seem like a fairer and perhaps even safer thing to do, but in fact it's a mistake; you're essentially inviting drivers to attempt a dangerous overtake, and the unscrupulous ones will cut you up.  
In slow-moving traffic and on fast two-lane downhills, **turn yourself into a car** (ride in the very middle of your lane) to prevent dangerous overtaking and to provide the best visibility of you to everyone else.

**Detachment protocol**—what to do (and not do) if you become detached from the group

As with the points of guidance on page 1, it is not essential that you follow this protocol to-the-letter, but it will likely make an irritating few minutes somewhat less irritating both for you and everyone else!

If you become detached from the group, the first thing to do is to **relax; don't panic!** Throughout any given group ride, the leader is checking the presence of the known participants very regularly, so your absence will be noticed very soon if not already. Also,

**do not attempt to make phone calls to anyone in the group, including the group leader,** and **do not embark on a presumed route of interception.**

(To understand why it is a bad idea for you to phone the group, see Guideline #1, and note also that the one cyclist in the group who you call may not easily be able to halt the whole group, which they would have to do in order to take the call without themselves becoming detached.)

Instead, **do these helpful things, in the given order:**

1. If you are already stopped at a public-road turn-off or junction, check your phone for mobile network signal. If you have signal, stay put, be immediately ready to answer your phone, and jump to instruction #2.

Otherwise:

- If you last remember being *ahead* of the group, do a U-turn (after which you and the group might be reunited anyway) and cycle back to the first public-road turn-off or junction you come across (the last one you passed before), stop there, and immediately check your phone for signal. If you have signal, stay put. Else continue to retrace your pedal-strokes to the next public-road turn-off or junction and check again there, repeating until you have signal.

- If you last remember being *behind* the group, keep cycling on to the first public-road turn-off or junction you come across, stop there, and immediately check your phone for signal. If you have signal, stay put. Else choose the direction your intuition suggests would have been followed by the group or else gets you to signal swiftest (it doesn't actually matter), cycle in that direction to the next public road turn-off or junction and check again there, repeating until you have signal.

Because you've stopped at a public-road junction, it will be easier for us to identify your location and hence to decide what instructions to issue you with.

2. Post a short message on the WhatsApp group thread to say that you're stationary and ready for instructions. In this initial message, *do not* try to describe where you are; leave that for your subsequent message and our phone call to you.

3. If you have facilities on your phone to determine your location and you know how to use them, do so to determine one—*and only one*—of the following, given here in order of preference:

OS grid reference, What3Words address, Royal Mail postcode.

Then post your second message on the WhatsApp group thread, with that information.

Otherwise, take a few photos of the junction you are at (preferably low-resolution photos, as they will load faster at the low mobile network speeds typical of rural locations), including all sides of any direction signposts, and post those to the WhatsApp group thread.

**Remember: we'll phone you—not the other way around!**

## **Notes on the points of guidance**—by corresponding number

1. A phone suddenly sounding while cycling is second in heinousness only to being hooted by a driver from behind, i.e., an unwelcome, balance-challenging surprise, and to other cyclists around you as well as you yourself. You're welcome to revert your phone when the group is stationary.

4. For the best view of potential danger when checking behind, look over your right shoulder (in this country). But, if you're not currently confident that you can keep the bike straight when looking behind you, give yourself a little more room from the kerb/verge and look over your left shoulder instead. Then, if you go belly-up, you'll at least have veered towards the verge instead of the oncoming traffic.

Ignore the often-dispersed but mistaken advice that all checks-behind should be over the left shoulder. Only rarely will you have the best view of danger that way round, and the advice is utterly incorrect for the important final "death glance" when turning right.

Checks-behind (a.k.a. "shoulder-checks") are a safety skill worth some practice, over both shoulders and at different speeds, and the HSCP Cycle Rides are excellent opportunities to practise!

On checking behind even before turning left: reasons include showing drivers behind that you intend to turn and will likely slow down to do so, and to discover whether drivers immediately behind will be following you left.

5. As neither the rear cyclists nor the first driver behind them are particularly well-positioned to judge the lengths of the gaps in a strung-out group and before the next bend, the cyclists should leave that responsibility with that driver. Also, only the driver knows their own proficiency to react quickly if needed when overtaking the cyclists.

6. The HC does not require movement to single-file; it states that cyclists riding two-abreast or more should allow drivers behind to overtake when they feel it is safe to let them do so, and merely suggests movement to single-file as one way to do this. In fact, there is no legal limit to the number of cyclists riding "abreast" on any type of road in any scenario, and both British Cycling and Cycling UK encourage staying two-abreast not only when drivers behind are waiting to overtake but also when they are actually overtaking, arguing it to be safest by default. As you can imagine, the issue is a hot potato with road users, and especially so in busy, cyclist-dense counties like Surrey and Yorkshire.

With regard to leisurely-paced social cycling groups like HSCP, leader DT finds several faults in the arguments of the two aforementioned, rather self-interested organisations, but not with the HC. Its most recent, national-news-making update, of January 2022, saw the relevant and notorious Rule #66 reworded more intelligently than those organisations give it credit for. If you want to know more, do ask DT on one of the rides.

7. The three exceptions to the default action (to wait at the next public-road turn-off or junction) are:

- The group leader has given you directions up to some further point, at which you should stop and wait.
- The group leader knows you know the route and has told you at which further point you should stop and wait.
- You can see or hear an emergency on a road ahead without emergency services yet in attendance, such that its outcome may depend to any extent on your prompt action to go and assist.

10. The HC considers cycles, like cars, to be "carriages", and it supports you when it is safest to use the very middle of your lane. In addition to the two common scenarios given, there are other less common ones where this is also the safest way to ride.

On narrow rural lanes, drivers must wait behind you at your discretion, but you should make fair judgements. Going downhill and when cycling fast, attempting to stop on a narrow lane is relatively unsafe, so don't; drivers can wait for you to finish, as they won't be going faster than you anyway. Going uphill, it depends; if you've challenged yourself to reach the top of a sizeable hill without stopping, then don't stop—most drivers on such roads understand your right to attempt this challenge untroubled and they won't want to cause you to fail. Otherwise, and when pootling along on the flat, it's good form to pull into the next driveway or lay-by to allow drivers behind to pass.