

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, nor even appropriate for, other organised cycle groups.

Explanations for some of the guidelines are 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. **Do not 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, and instructions barked by the ride leader.
Accordingly, **do immediately interrupt conversation to flag hazards to others**.
3. **Point out significant potholes**, road subsidence, deeply dropped verges, unexpected surface gravel or sand, etc., as you cycle past them, to warn the cyclists behind.
4. **Check behind before braking to stop**, before moving across the road to pass parked vehicles or other cyclists or to cycle two-abreast, and before signalling to turn (even for turning left).
5. **Do not wave-through vehicles behind**, even if the lane for oncoming traffic appears clear ahead.
(There are rare exceptions which only the ride leader should exercise, often involving temporary traffic lights.)
6. **When drivers behind are waiting for an opportunity to overtake, drop into single-file** (unless safeguarding a nervous or struggling cyclist).
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 ride leader**.
If you're in front of the ride leader, 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 ride 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! It's not rude, under the circumstances!
10. (General cycling advice, not specific to cycling in groups) **Do not cycle closer to the kerb/verge to attempt to make space for vehicles behind to overtake you within the same lane as you**.
In slow-moving traffic and on fast two-lane downhills, **turn yourself into a car** (ride in the very middle of your lane) to discourage 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 ride 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:

1. **Relax; don't panic!** The ride leader will notice your absence very soon, if they haven't already. Also, **do not attempt to make phone calls to anyone in the group, including the ride leader**, and **do not embark on a presumed route of interception.**

2. 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 #3.

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 which), 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.

3. Post a short message on the WhatsApp group thread to say that you've stopped and are awaiting instructions.

In this initial message, *do not* try to describe where you are; leave that for your next message. We may be able to phone you before you send the next message, but we won't phone you until you've sent this first message.

4. 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; precise latitude-longitude coordinates; Royal Mail postcode.

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

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 ride guidance—by corresponding number

1. A phone suddenly sounding while cycling is not quite as bad as being hooted at by a driver from behind, but it is nevertheless an unwelcome surprise, and to other cyclists around you as well as you yourself. You're welcome to revert your phone when the group is stopped and off the road.

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 checks-behind should be over the left shoulder by default. You don't get the best view of danger that way round in most scenarios, 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. Follow this guidance even on roads with two or more marked lanes. The issue of whether cyclists staying two-abreast are behaving reasonably is a hot potato with road users (especially in cyclist-dense counties like Surrey and Yorkshire), so a bit more background is provided here. 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 a way to allow 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. But these two organisations do tend to uphold cyclists' interests at all costs to motorised traffic, and their recommendation clearly provides no balance for motorists on narrow roads and main roads with relatively narrow marked lanes, which are the vast majority of roads in this country. It's notable that, when the HC was last updated, in January 2022, the intelligent, balanced rewording of the relevant and notorious Rule #66 was not well received by the aforementioned organisations. If you want to know more, 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 ride leader has given you directions up to some further point, at which you should stop and wait.
- The ride 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.

Riding in front of the ride leader is not usually allowed by other organised cycle groups; HSCP Cycle Rides are exceptional in this regard.

10. Riding closer to the kerb/verge may seem like a fairer and perhaps even safer thing to do, especially when a large vehicle is behind you, but it's a mistake; you're essentially inviting drivers to attempt a dangerous overtake, and the unscrupulous ones will cut you up. The HC considers cycles, like cars, to be "carriages", and as such it supports cycles to use any part of the marked lane they are travelling in. On narrow rural lanes, vehicles must wait behind you at your discretion, but you should make fair judgements to avoid inciting their drivers to drive dangerously around you. 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 wouldn'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. Elsewhere, show good form and pull over to let them pass.