

Lehigh Valley Cycling Club

Guide to Riding in Groups

4/2025

For as much fun as solo riding can be, group riding extends and enriches your bicycling experience by adding social dimensions as well as technical and physical challenges.

Successful group riding depends on communication and coordination between riders. This Guide establishes a common understanding of our club's riding etiquette and signals. Please read this Guide regardless of your level of skill and experience so we, as a club and group, are on the same page on the important safety and etiquette matters in this Guide.

Contents

1. Preliminaries
2. Join a ride
3. Drafting
4. Pace Lines
5. Do's and Don'ts of Group Riding
6. Common Sins of Group Riding
7. Glossary of Hand and Vocal Signals
8. Glossary of Vocal Traffic Alert Signals
9. Group Etiquette

Preliminaries

Be familiar with the LVCC pace designations. Honestly assess your riding level. If you have a question contact the ride leader.

Practice smooth and straight line riding. Smooth and straight riding is important for predictable riding. Smooth and straight line riding depends on even or gradually increasing pressure on pedals, static weight distribution on the bike and no or carefully modulated movements. Bike fit is also a factor. Practice steady riding by cycling on a white road edge line where there is shoulder to the right.

Ride at a consistent pace. When riding in groups consistent speed and cadence is essential to everyone's comfort, safety and peace of mind. Practice consistent pacing while riding solo by varying pressure on the pedals to maintain your tempo and speed over varying moderate grades. Climbing steeper grades has its own challenges and riders will ascend at different speeds causing a group to get strung out. Don't panic. If you get dropped on a hill; climb at an even tempo that you can sustain. Ride leaders will regroup at the top of the climb or next intersection.

Know the Glossary of LVCC Signals. Know and understand the commonly used LVCC used hand and voice signals listed in this Guide.

Navigation tools and skills. Carry navigation aids. Route maps and que sheets are not typically available at the start of a ride but may be printed beforehand by downloading the route from Meetup and printing it. If you don't have a cycling specific navigation device every cell phone has GPS. Even if you don't use your phone for on route directions, know how to use its map features to get unlost.

Clipless Pedals. Clipless pedals are generally recognized as the preferred method to attach to the pedals. Clipping in not only gives you more power and ability to use varied leg muscle; clipping in also gives you the secure link to your bike critical to group riding. When new to clipless pedals set the pedal to release the cleat easily. Practice by stabilizing with a tree, wall or friend.

Etiquette. Know the etiquette described in this Guide as well as general cycling etiquette.

Join a ride

Introduce yourself. Introduce yourself to the ride leader and others in the group.

Ride consistently and predictably. Make no sudden stops, no sudden turns and do not weave from your line. Provide appropriate hand and voice signals for any changes in your speed or direction.

Obey traffic laws. Bikes are considered a vehicle and subject to rules of the road. When riding on LVCC group rides please obey all traffic laws.

Observe Riding Etiquette. A partial list is included later in this Guide.

Wear a helmet. Required of all riders.

Carry flat repair equipment. Be equipped to repair flats. Carry spare tubes, levers, and a pump or inflator and CO2. Consider other items such as a master link and tools for minor adjustments and repairs.

Carry your cell phone. Record your ride leader's cell phone number.

Carry ID. Carry a copy of your driver's license. An expired license in the saddle bag is a good system. If you have special medical needs or allergies to medication, carry a card denoting them. An alternative is an ID bracelet.

Drafting

Riding in the draft of another cyclist saves significant energy, from 15% to 50% depending on wind speed, rider speed, incline and distance apart. Drafting also increases the speed and reduces the effort of the leader. Two riders drafting are faster and more efficient than riding separately. Thus, a slower rider may be assisted, to rejoin a group for example, by a stronger rider drafting behind the slower rider. This approach is particularly useful when the slower rider is unable to “hold the tail” of a person in front.

The wind shadow or draft envelope extends for about a bike length behind a single bike. To take advantage of the shadow your front tire needs to be within about three feet of the front rider’s rear wheel. Experienced riders will often ride within inches of each other, but this takes a great deal of skill and focus. As described below tight pace line drafting uses specialized techniques. Tight pace line spacing is not appropriate when casually drafting in a group.

When a group is drafting it is particularly important to call out hazards since the vision of following riders is limited and generally follow the standards described in this Guide.

Pace Lines

Pace lines are a subset of drafting where the riders collectively organize in lines, focus on speed and social interactions are necessarily limited. Pace lines are very much a part of riding with “A” level riders and race groups as well as some “B” level rides. “C” level rides despite of not generally organizing into pace lines, offer opportunities to “get on someone’s wheel”. Club pace lines provide a safe and effective way to gain pace line skills. Club pace lines are nothing quite like the well-oiled team pace lines ridden by professionals but are an integral part of cycling and add a dimension of skill and achievement to cycling.

Knowing pace line techniques and etiquette is important for your safety and that of others. Information on the web about pace line technique may be found by searching “pace line riding”. You are encouraged to review such materials.

Pace lines vary by the degree of formality in organization. In pace lines with very tight spacing, inches between wheels, the greatest formality in technique is required. It is not appropriate to join, and you will not be welcome in, a tightly spaced pace line using formal pace line rotation and communication techniques without the pace line’s consent which might be obtained by immediately demonstrating proficiency in formal pace lining.

LVCC pace lines may form as either single lines or parallel double lines. Larger groups typically use double lines on appropriate roads to allow cars a quicker passing opportunity.

Ideally the front rider will “pull” for a period of time, typically between 30 seconds and several minutes, before signaling with an elbow or hand or yelling “pulling” and pulling off to the left of a single line. The rider then reduces pace slightly to permit the line to pass and then falls in line at the back of the line as the line passes. A rider pulling should slow down only slightly so as to be just slightly below the pace of the line so as to fall end at the end without effort to catch up with the line. In a double parallel pace line the right line leader pulls over to the right side of the line and the leader of the left line moves to the left allowing both columns of riders to advance between them as they move to the back of the line.

Do's and Don'ts of Group Riding

Hand Signals – DO use hand signals. Hand signals are necessary to relay information about road condition, debris, pedestrians, autos, other riders, stop signs and lights, turns, speed changes and pace line leader rotation. Give signals for four or more seconds in advance. DO pass signals along to the rider behind you. DO NOT use hand signals in situations where taking your hands from the handlebars is dangerous. Frequently voice signals are more effective and appropriate.

Voice Signals – DO use voice signals. They are immediate, you don't need to take your hands off the handlebars, communicate to following riders who are not looking at your arms and they communicate to riders ahead and further behind. DO use voice signals to augment hand signals, especially for immediate cautions such as sudden slowing or stopping, bike eating potholes, gravel, pedestrians, and unexpected autos. DO repeat voice signals to both reaffirm that you heard and pass along the warning.

Positioning in a Group – DO maintain a consistent position in the group. Whilst you may generally position yourself where you prefer in a group and change position relative to other riders as riding paces and other factors warrant, frequent position changes are unsettling to dynamics of a group ride and unsafe. Avoid overtaking riders if you can't maintain the pace to hold your new position. When changing position move into a place with sufficient space for you, don't force other riders to drop back to accommodate your positioning. Settle into a pace and position and enjoy the ride.

Position – DO hold your line. DO NOT swerve or weave. Avoid sudden deviations from your line when moving around holes, debris, pedestrians, or parked autos. It is best to move minimally and in longer sweeping arcs around an object as well as after the object is passed.

Spacing - DO maintain a wheel's length distance from the rider in front of you. DO NOT maintain pace line spacing, that is spacing of less than 2 feet from the wheel front of you, when simply drafting in a group. DO NOT overlap the wheel in front or “half wheel.” Your primary responsibility is to keep from touching the wheel in front. If the rider in front of you moves laterally for any reason while your front wheel is overlapping theirs, you likely will

not be able to avoid a wheel touch. Your secondary responsibility is to ride smoothly and consistently and signal those behind you to help them keep from touching your wheel. DO anticipate the accordion effect of riders slowing down on rises and maintain your spacing. DO increase your spacing on fractured pavement surfaces.

Pass on the left -DO pass on the left. Announcing your intention in advance is a good practice with words such as with “On your left”. Passing on the right is not only unexpected but is not in the field of sight of many mirrors. Because of this, when passing on the right it is necessary to announce your intention with words such as “On your right”.

Look ahead – DO NOT fixate on the road or the rear wheel of the rider in front. DO look ahead often. Try to anticipate what the riders in front need to do.

DO NOT draft on steep descents – DO increase space on steep descents, including lateral space, space to any riders abreast. Higher speeds create higher risks of severe injury and the potential for high-speed crashes simply does not warrant the risk inherent in downhill drafting. DO maintain spacing of at least two to three full bike lengths on coasting descents.

Pullbacks – DO anticipate pace decreases. When a rider rises to stand on the pedals, when starting an uphill grade for example, the bike will often be pushed suddenly rearward a few inches. DO anticipate this and adjust your pace or positioning. DO NOT be caught napping!

Stopping – DO slow down in as straight line and as gradually as possible. DO NOT turn laterally from the direction of travel. When stopped, stand as far to the right as possible.

Common Sins of Group Riding

Sudden braking Avoid sudden braking. When braking suddenly, call out loudly “Stopping” or “Braking”. Use Feather-light braking to maintain distance from the bike in front of you. Look ahead to anticipate conditions and actions by others so as to avoid the need for sudden braking.

Overlapping the wheel of the rider in front of you – When your wheel overlaps the wheel in front any lateral movement from that forward rider can result in a wheel touch. Wheel touches usually result in crashes. A rider who touches the wheel in front is the one who goes down.

Failure to signal – Nobody likes rude surprises.

Excessive signals – Don’t call out as hazards matters don’t present a hazard to the average cyclist. Causing riders to react to insignificant items in the road is a hazard of itself.

Random Suddenness – Don't do anything suddenly.

Passing on the right – Avoid passing on the right, you aren't in the field of view for many mirror placements, but if forced to, announce your intention first.

Glossary of Hand and Vocal Signals

Use Vocal signals especially when it is risky to remove hands from handlebars.

Left turn signal - Left arm out to the side. "LEFT TURN"

Right turn signal – Right arm out to the side. "RIGHT TURN"

Slowing – Hand behind seat, palm open, facing back. Augment with vocal signal. "SLOWING"

Stopping – Hand behind seat palm opening and closing. Augment with vocal signal. "STOPPING", especially for sudden an full stops.

Move Left around Object – Tap hip with right hand as a signal for pedestrians, slow riders, parked or stopped cars, etc. Augment with vocal signal: "LOOK AHEAD" or "HEADS UP"

Road Surface Hazard – Point down to side of hole, gravel, "road kill" or other road surface hazard to avoid. Move away from indicated side. Augment with voice signal "HOLE", "GRAVEL", "ROAD KILL", "GRATE".

Glossary of Vocal Traffic Alert Signals

"STOPPING" Yell loudly especially when making a hard stop.

"CAR UP" Any Vehicle - car, truck, tractor, horse & buggy - approaching from front.

"CAR BACK" Any Vehicle overtaking from behind. It is not necessary to warn of cars where the traffic is expected, for example on heavily traveled roads where cars are constant, or when riding on a defined cycling shoulder or lane.

"STOP, CAR" Vehicle is entering intersection being crossed, requiring riders to stop. Since car and clear sound too similar to people behind you the key word here is "STOP" adding the word "CAR" means you're serious.

"LOOK LEFT" or "LOOK RIGHT" Vehicle is approaching intersection but still with enough distance from the intersection being crossed so as to be safe for the immediately following riders to proceed. May be followed by "STOP, CAR" as vehicle approaches intersection.

“ON YOUR RIGHT” or “ON YOUR LEFT” Alert the rider in front when you are passing.

Group Etiquette

In Pennsylvania cyclists may “own the lane” but few drivers are aware of this part of the law. Be courteous to people in cars and share the roads with them. Do not unnecessarily impede or slow down cars. Cycle in a single line unless the size of the road and the absence of traffic permits otherwise.

Talking is fine, but taking your eyes from the road to look at the rider you’re talking to is not.

Spitting and blowing snot rockets is rude when others are close behind you. Pick your moment with care.

Drinking from a water bottle while in a pace line is risky. Move to the back when you want to drink.

Do not talk on your cell phone while riding. Refrain from using ear-buds of any type while riding in a group.

Avoid getting lost. If you don’t know where you’re going stay with the group or with someone who does.

If you leave a group ride please make advise the ride leader of your intentions, even if you have to do it by text or voice message.

If you are a stronger rider in a group in a slower group be considerate of the ride-leader who is responsible for leading the entire group. Rather than leading off the front to string out the group, help keep the group together. Be the leader’s wingperson and offer encouragement to others and pace stragglers back to the group.

FINALLY, DO NOT CALL CLEAR. It is not possible for a rider to know with certainty that the crossing will be clear for following riders when they arrive to cross.