

Defining a Three Feet Minimum Safe Passing Distance in Georgia

Georgia Bikes Alliance, the statewide advocacy organization, asks for your **SUPPORT** on HB 988.

Problem Definition

Bicyclists traveling on Georgia’s roadways face risks associated with motorists passing too closely, even when cyclists are riding as far to the right as practicable (in accordance with state and local laws). This practice is known as being “buzzed,” and is both an unnecessary risk and a causal factor in too many bicycle crashes.

Benefits of Defining the Minimum Safe Passing Distance

- 1) Prevent crashes
- 2) Add clarity to driver education
- 3) Facilitate enforcement

1) Crash prevention – Georgia Crash Data: 2004-2006

- 2,819 bicycle crashes reported
- 1,049 involved a car and a bicycle both traveling straight
- 34 of the cyclists in these crashes were killed

Over half (54%) the total number of cyclists killed on Georgia’s roadways over the three-year period were involved in crashes in which the motor vehicle and bicycle were both traveling straight, i.e. an overtaking scenario. Requiring drivers to give at least three feet when passing, if adequately promoted and enforced, would greatly lessen the risk of cyclists being hit by passing cars in Georgia.

2004	2005	2006
20	23	19

Reported Cyclist Deaths in Georgia 2004-2006

According to a University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center study of a six state sample, motorists passing too closely accounted for 1.2% of crashes, but 22% of those crashes resulted in serious injury or death, indicating a very dangerous crash type.

2) Education

This law would help organizations charged with improving the safety of Georgia’s roadways to better educate the public on the minimum safe distance for passing bicyclists. Currently, many motorists including professionals such as taxi and bus drivers believe simply avoiding contact with a bicyclist is all that is required. They are often unaware of the danger of passing a cyclist too closely, which even in instances in which the cyclist is not hit can lead to a crash from the cyclist’s reflexive action.

3) Enforcement

Defining the minimum safe passing distance as three feet would give law enforcement a measurable tool for improving safety. Officers in Woodstock, Georgia conducted an undercover operation in 2008 to demonstrate the safe passing distance to drivers, and simply carried a yardstick to give drivers not giving sufficient passing distance a better sense of the measurement.

Other States:

Current Law in 14: AZ, AR, CO, CT, FL, IL, LA, ME, MN, NH, OK, TN, UT, WI

Pending in 7: GA, MD, MO, OH, SD, VA, WA

Sources:

National Center for Statistics and Analysis, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Georgia DOT Traffic Records, University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center