

Safety Check ✓

From the Safety Chick

What makes a safe bicycle route?

As a rookie cyclist I became very familiar with the trails and paths throughout the Chicago area. Wishing to expand my cycling area, I joined the Arlington Heights Bicycle Association. I expected the club to be familiar with more trails and paths. To my surprise, I learned that most of the club rides would be on roads. ROADS . . . perhaps, I thought, these people are crazy or have a death wish.

Thankfully I found most of the members are not crazy and do not have a death wish. They do know the importance of using a safe route. Trails and paths can provide excellent alternatives to busy streets but they too can be dangerous and should be ridden with caution. The trails and paths in our area have a high volume of users; pedestrians, bladers and other cyclists so stay aware.

Many items contribute to determining if a route is safe. The skill level of the riders, road conditions including traffic speed, width and number of lanes, volume of traffic and quantity of stop signs and signals.

Here are some items to look for when determining a safe route.
(source: www.cse.ucsc.edu)

When possible, use on-street routes. Sidewalks and parallel paths are more dangerous than roads especially at street intersections.

Ride on the right side of the street with traffic.

On a steep grade, novice riders have a tendency to weave. Until a rider can consistently maintain a straight line they should use caution on roads that have a steep grade and traffic.

For cars and bicycles to share a road safely, the lane should be at least 14 feet wide.

Left turns are more dangerous than right turns. Learn the proper way to make a left turn.

Right turn lanes, when a cyclist is traveling straight can also become a difficult situation. Staying aware of the traffic around you is very important.

The most direct route is not always the safest; detours may be necessary to stay safe.