

Tennessee Bicycle Laws

In Tennessee, a bicycle has the legal status of a vehicle. This means that bicyclists have full rights and responsibilities on the roadway and are subject to the regulations governing the operation of a motor vehicle. Tennessee traffic laws require bicyclists to:

- Ride on the right-hand side of the road with the same direction as traffic
- Obey all traffic signs and signals
- Use hand signals to communicate intended movements
- Equip their bicycles with a front white light visible from 500 feet and either a red reflector or a lamp emitting a red light which shall be visible from a distance of at least five hundred feet (500') to the rear

In addition, the TN Child Bicycle Safety Act requires that:

- All bicycle operators under 16 years of age must wear a bicycle helmet on any highway, street, or sidewalk
- All child passengers under 40 pounds or 40 inches must be seated and secured in a child restraining seat or a bicycle trailer

TCA 55-52-103 - Bicycle Chapter Definitions

As used in this part, unless the context otherwise requires:

- (1) "Bicycle" means a human-powered vehicle with two (2) wheels in tandem designed to transport, by the action of pedaling, one (1) or more persons seated on one (1) or more saddle seats on its frame. "Bicycle" also includes a human-powered vehicle designed to transport by pedaling that has more than two (2) wheels where the vehicle is used on a public highway or street, public bicycle path or other public right-of-way, but does not include a tricycle;
- (2) "Highway" or "street" means the entire width between boundary lines of every way publicly maintained, when any part thereof is open to the use of the public for purposes of vehicular travel;
- (3) "Operator" means a person who travels on a bicycle seated on a saddle seat from which that person is intended to and can pedal the bicycle;
- (4) "Other public right-of-way" means any right-of-way other than a public highway or street or public bicycle path that is under the jurisdiction and control of the state or a local political subdivision thereof and is designed for use and used by vehicular and/or pedestrian traffic;
- (5) "Passenger" means any person who travels on a bicycle in any manner except as an operator;
- (6) "Protective bicycle helmet" means a piece of headgear that meets or exceeds the impact standards for protective bicycle helmets set by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) or the Snell Memorial Foundation, or that is otherwise approved by the commissioner of safety;
- (7) "Public bicycle path" means a right-of-way under the jurisdiction and control of the state or a local political subdivision thereof for use primarily by bicycles and pedestrians;
- (8) "Restraining seat" means a seat separate from the saddle seat of the operator of the bicycle that is fastened securely to the frame of the bicycle and is adequately equipped to restrain the passenger in the seat and protect the passenger from the moving parts of the bicycle;
- (9) "Sidewalk" means that portion of a street between the curb lines, or the lateral lines of a roadway, and the adjacent property lines, intended for use of pedestrians; and
- (10) "Tricycle" means a three-wheeled human-powered vehicle.

TCA 55-52-105 - Child Bicycle Safety Rules and Regulations

With regard to any bicycle operated over any highway, street or sidewalk, it is unlawful:

- (1) For any person under sixteen (16) years of age to operate or be a passenger on a bicycle unless at all times when so engaged the person wears a protective bicycle helmet of good fit fastened securely upon the head with the straps of the helmet;

(2) For any person to be a passenger on a bicycle unless, with respect to any person who weighs less than forty pounds (40 lbs.), or is less than forty inches (40") in height, the person can be and is properly seated in and adequately secured to a restraining seat;

(3) For any parent or legal guardian of a person under twelve (12) years of age to knowingly permit the person to operate or be a passenger on a bicycle in violation of subdivision (1) or (2); and

(4) To rent or lease any bicycle to or for the use of any person under sixteen (16) years of age unless:

(A) The person is in possession of a protective bicycle helmet of good fit at the time of the rental or lease; or

(B) The rental or lease includes a protective bicycle helmet of good fit, and the person intends to wear the helmet, as required by subdivision (1), at all times while operating or being a passenger on the bicycle.

TCA 55-52-106 - Penalty to Violation of 55-52-105

(a) Except as provided in subsection (b), any adult person violating any requirements set forth in § 55-52-105, commits a violation and shall be assessed a civil penalty of two dollars (\$2.00) and court costs.

(b) Upon commission of the first offense within a twelve-month period under § 55-52-105(3), it shall be a defense that the accused has since the date of the violation purchased or provided a protective bicycle helmet or a restraining seat, and uses and intends to use or causes to be used or intends to cause to be used the same as the law requires.

(c) In no event shall failure to wear a protective bicycle helmet or to secure a passenger to a restraining seat be admissible as evidence in a trial of any civil action.

(d) A law enforcement officer observing any violation of this part shall issue a warning to the violator for the first offense and a citation to the violator for the second or subsequent offense, but shall not arrest or take into custody any person solely for a violation of this part.

TCA 55-8-171 - Operation of Bicycles and Play Vehicles - Penalty - Effect of Regulations

(a) It is a Class C misdemeanor for any person to do any act forbidden or fail to perform any act required in §§ 55-8-171 -- 55-8-177.

(b) The parent of any child and the guardian of any ward shall not authorize or knowingly permit that child or ward to violate any of the provisions of this chapter and chapter 10, parts 1-5 of this title.

(c) The regulations applicable to bicycles shall apply whenever a bicycle is operated upon any highway or upon any path set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles subject to those exceptions stated herein.

TCA 55-8-172 - Traffic Laws Apply to Persons Riding Bicycles – Penalty

- Every person riding a bicycle upon a roadway is granted all of the rights and is subject to all of the duties applicable to the driver of a vehicle by this chapter and chapter 10, parts 1-5 of this title, except as to special regulations in §§ 55-8-171 -- 55-8-177, and except as to those provisions of this chapter and chapter 10, parts 1-5 of this title that by their nature can have no application.
- A violation of subsection (a) is a Class C misdemeanor.

TCA 55-8-110 - Traffic-control Signals-- Inoperative signals with vehicle detection devices for bicycles

(d) Notwithstanding any law to the contrary, the rider of a bicycle approaching an intersection that is controlled by a traffic-control signal utilizing a vehicle detection device that is inoperative due to the size of the bicycle shall come to a full and complete stop at the intersection and, after exercising due care as provided by law, may proceed with due caution when it is safe to do so. It is not a defense to a violation of § 55-8-109 that the rider of a bicycle proceeded under the belief that a traffic-control signal utilized a vehicle detection device or was inoperative due to the size of the bicycle when the signal did not utilize a vehicle detection device or that the device was not in fact inoperative due to the size of the bicycle.

TCA 55-8-173 - Riding on Bicycles – Penalty

(a) A person propelling a bicycle shall not ride other than upon or astride a permanent and regular seat

attached thereto, except for a certified police cyclist who is performing duties that require riding in a side dismounting position.

(b) No bicycle shall be used to carry more persons at one (1) time than the number for which it is designed or equipped.

(c) No person shall play on a highway other than upon the sidewalk thereof, within a city or town, or in any part of a highway outside the limits of a city or town, or use thereon roller skates, coasters or any similar vehicle or toy or article on wheels or a runner, except in those areas as may be specially designated for that purpose by local authorities.

(d) A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

TCA 55-8-174 - Clinging to Vehicles – Penalty

- No person riding upon any bicycle, roller skates, sled or toy vehicle shall attach the bicycle, roller skates, sled or toy vehicle, or that person's own body, to any streetcar or vehicle upon a roadway.
- This section shall not be construed to prohibit the attachment of a bicycle trailer or bicycle semitrailer to a bicycle if the trailer or semitrailer is designed specifically for that purpose.
- A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

TCA 55-8-175 - Riding on Roadways and Bike Paths – Penalty

(a) (1) Any person operating a bicycle upon a roadway at less than the normal speed of traffic at the time and place and under the conditions then existing shall ride as close as practicable to the right-hand curb or edge of the roadway, except under any of the following situations:

(A) When overtaking and passing another vehicle proceeding in the same direction;

(B) When preparing for a left turn at an intersection or into a private road or driveway; or

(C) When reasonably necessary to avoid conditions including, but not limited to, fixed or moving objects, parked or moving vehicles, pedestrians, animals, surface hazards, or substandard width lanes that make it unsafe to continue along the right-hand curb or edge. For purposes of this section, "substandard width lane" means a lane that is too narrow for a bicycle and another vehicle to travel safely side by side within the lane.

(2) This subsection (a) does not apply to a certified police cyclist engaged in the lawful performance of duty relating to traffic control.

(b) (1) Persons riding bicycles upon a roadway shall not ride more than two (2) abreast except on paths or parts of roadways set aside for the exclusive use of bicycles. Persons riding two (2) abreast shall not impede the normal and reasonable movement of traffic and, on a laned roadway, shall ride within a single lane.

(2) Subdivision (b)(1) does not apply to a certified police cyclist engaged in the lawful performance of duty relating to traffic control or in pursuit of an actual or suspected violator of the law.

(c) (1) This subsection (c) shall be known and may be cited as the "Jeff Roth and Brian Brown Bicycle Protection Act of 2007."

(2) The operator of a motor vehicle, when overtaking and passing a bicycle proceeding in the same direction on the roadway, shall leave a safe distance between the motor vehicle and the bicycle of not less than three feet (3') and shall maintain the clearance until safely past the overtaken bicycle.

(d) A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

TCA 55-8-176 - Carrying Articles on Bicycles – Penalty

(a) No person operating a bicycle shall carry any package, bundle or article that prevents the driver from keeping at least one (1) hand upon the handlebars.

(b) A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

TCA 55-8-177 - Bicycle Lamps and Brakes – Penalty

(a) Every bicycle, when in use at nighttime, shall be equipped with a lamp on the front, which shall emit a

white light visible from a distance of at least five hundred feet (500') to the front, and either a red reflector or a lamp emitting a red light, which shall be visible from a distance of at least five hundred feet (500') to the rear, when directly in front of lawful upper beams of head lamps on a motor vehicle.

(b) Every bicycle shall be equipped with a brake or brakes which will enable its driver to stop the bicycle within twenty-five feet (25') from a speed of ten miles per hour (10 mph) on dry, level, clean pavement.

(c) A violation of this section is a Class C misdemeanor.

TCA 55-8-197 Failure to Yield Right of Way - Rules of the Road

Any person who violates subdivisions (a)(1)-(6) and the violation results in an accident resulting in serious bodily injury to or death of any person shall be guilty of a misdemeanor:

(1) Section 55-8-115 by failing to drive on the right half of the roadway as provided in the section, except for those motor vehicles in compliance with § 55-7-115 or § 55-7-202;

(2) Section 55-8-118 or § 55-8-119 by unlawfully overtaking and passing another vehicle as provided in those sections;

(3) Section 55-8-128, § 55-8-129, § 55-8-130 or § 55-8-131 by failing to yield the right of way as provided in those sections;

(4) Section 55-8-134, by failing to yield the right-of-way to pedestrians in crosswalks as provided in the section;

(5) Section 55-8-136, by failing to exercise due care as provided in the section; or

(6) Section 55-8-175(c), by failing to overtake and pass a bicycle safely as provided in § 55-8-175(c).

(b) For the purposes of this section, unless the context otherwise requires, "serious bodily injury" means:

(1) Substantial risk of death;

(2) Serious disfigurement; or

(3) Protracted loss or impairment of the function of any bodily member, organ or mental faculty.

(c) (1) A violation of subsection (a) is a Class B misdemeanor punishable by a fine of two hundred and fifty dollars (\$250) if the accident results in serious bodily injury of another.

(2) A violation of subsection (a) is a Class A misdemeanor punishable by a fine of five hundred dollars (\$500) if the accident results in the death of another.

(d) The court shall send the department a record of any of the convictions of any of the sections indicated in subsection (a). The court shall indicate on the record or abstract whether the violation resulted in serious bodily injury of another or death of another.

(e) Upon conviction, the court may revoke the license or permit to drive and any nonresident operating privilege of a person convicted under this section for a period of up to six (6) months, if the accident results in serious bodily injury of another, and up to one (1) year if the accident results in death of another.

55-8-127. Restrictions on use of controlled-access roadway.

(a) The department of transportation and local authorities may, with respect to any controlled-access roadway under their respective jurisdictions, prohibit the use of that roadway by pedestrians, bicycles or other nonmotorized traffic or by any person operating a motor-driven cycle.

(b) The department or the local authority adopting any such prohibitory regulation shall erect and maintain official signs on the controlled-access roadway on which the regulations are applicable, and when the signs are erected, a person who disobeys the restrictions stated on the signs commits a Class C misdemeanor.

- See more at: <https://www.tn.gov/tdot/article/bikeped-bikelaws#sthash.LHIAYPMF.dpuf>