**SOLIDARITY CYCLE**

***Thank you to Victoria Grandmothers for African for this document***

**TIPS FOR CYCLING SAFELY IN A GROUP**

Cycling requires skill, energy and focus. You will be riding a long distance in a relatively large group. Please be aware of the many things you need to keep in mind at all times.

**A. You need to be in the present, predictable and prudent**

**It is important to stay in the moment, to focus on what you are doing and not to let your mind drift: inattention can be dangerous on a bike. Being alert to your surroundings at all times will help eliminate unwelcome surprises.**

To help you do this, you need to have flashing lights front and back, a rear view mirror, a helmet securely attached and flat on your head. Remember to be well hydrated and fuelled. It is also very helpful to have an odometer.

**B. RIDING ALONE**

1. If you are on a well-maintained trail, you have to look out for yourself and others who may speed past you, approach you or obstruct you as you cycle, but the experience is usually quite safe.

2.  If you cycle on a roadway, glass, sticks, drain covers and other hazards are often right where you are riding.

3. Cars may pass you too closely for comfort, turn left or right in front of you or be parked directly in your path, forcing you to go around them. There may also be someone inside the car you are passing, and is perhaps just about to open the driver’s door right into your bike.  Therefore, you need to ride a metre away from a parked car and/or visually check to see if anyone is inside the car.

4. Riding a metre away from parked cars and from the edge of the road puts you somewhat closer to moving traffic.  However, riding in a straight line is much preferable to moving in and out of spaces between parked cars. This can be very scary at first, but as you gain confidence you will learn that drivers generally respect you, but often don’t see you.

**Always assume drivers don’t see you and act accordingly.**

**C. RIDING** **IN A GROUP**

1. You are likely riding with other cyclists in front and behind you. You need to avoid crashing into the person ahead or being crashed into by the person behind you.

Therefore you need to ride at a steady pace and in a straight line, or you could become a hazard to the others.

You also need to be alert to the movements of the other cyclists in the group: slowing down, speeding up or moving around obstructions.

You even need to be alert to riders or walkers not in your group who might do something unexpected.

At the same time you need to be alert to vehicle traffic, traffic signals (stop signs, lights etc.)

You need to save up your conversations until the group stops for coffee, lunch, etc. It is very distracting to try to converse with another rider while you are focusing on all those other things.

2. You need to keep a pace at which others are also riding.

If you’re in the lead, you need to be alert to what is happening behind you and not get too far ahead.

If you are sweep you need to be alert to the people ahead of you and be prepared for the unexpected to happen.

If you are stronger than other riders you need to keep to a slower pace than you normally ride.

If you are slower than the other riders you may find yourself riding faster than normal and having problems being alert to anything but pedaling your bike as fast as you can while exhausting yourself. If you are cycling while exhausted, you may be a danger to yourself and other group members. That is why we tend to ride at the pace of the slower cyclists.

Note: Everyone rides hard up hills but some cyclists naturally maintain a faster pace than others. It can be hard for them to ride slowly uphill, so take the hill at your own pace and once you get to the top, at the first reasonable opportunity move over as far right as possible (preferably off the pavement entirely) to wait for others. Be prudent while passing, and after you have crested the hill and moved over to wait, do not start up again until the leader has gone by.

**D. CONSIDERATION OF OTHERS IN THE GROUP**

1. Always ride single file and in a straight line, usually about one metre from the right edge of the road but always well within the marked shoulder or bike lane.

2. Keep at least a minimum of a bike length between you and the person ahead of you. The important thing is to keep a distance that you believe will give you a chance to avoid a collision if something unexpected happens.

3. Maintain a constant speed as much as possible. Call out if you are slowing significantly or stopping. Not to do so can mean that the person behind you may keep on riding right into you. Both of you may well be injured in the collision that will result.

4. If someone ahead calls out information about conditions, it is good etiquette to relay the signal to the person behind you as well.  For example if the person ahead of you calls out “CLEAR” it means that the road we are about to cross is clear of traffic, so as you cross, check and call out clear if it is still clear for the person behind.  If a vehicle is approaching from the left call out “CAR LEFT” to alert the person behind to check carefully to the left before proceeding.

5.  If someone behind you calls out CAR BACK they want to make sure you move over as far right on the road as possible so that the car can pass easily.  Saying CAR UP is a signal to people ahead to pay attention to the approaching vehicle as the caller thinks you may be too far out into the road, so please pay attention.

6. If the person ahead uses hand signals that there is a hazard on the trail/road, first, it is important to understand what the signal means. Second, it is equally important to relay the signal so that people behind you also learn about the situation.  If it is glass, which is very bad, you can call out GLASS. This is sure to get the attention of the person behind because none of us wants to change a flat.

7. If you are the one at the front, be sure you signal when there are obstructions or hazards ahead so that the people behind you can avoid them.

8.  If you run over glass, call out that you are stopping; move as far right as possible; stop, get off your bike and with your cycling gloves in place, rotate the wheel and clean it all the way around to remove any glass that may be adhering to the rubber.  Continue and clean off the second wheel.

9. It is distracting to have someone chatting to you while you are trying to focus on cycling. So, please tell your gregarious companion that you are focusing on the road right now and would be happy to chat at a break.

**E.** **CROSSING INTERSECTIONS controlled with traffic lights, controlled with stop signs and uncontrolled.**

Note: the Motor Vehicle Act appears to be silent on correct action for groups of cyclists at intersections.

1. An intersection requires that all of your faculties be on alert as there are many opportunities for things to go wrong while motor vehicles are interacting so actively with a group on bicycles. It is imperative that you pay close attention while approaching, waiting for your turn to cross and while travelling through the intersection.

2. At a green traffic light that the group is proceeding straight through or turning left, the leader must decide whether the light is about to change. If this is the case, it may be best to wait for the next green light as just a few cyclists will be able to get through before it is too late. However, if there is a vehicle waiting for you to cross before it turns left, you will need to signal for them to proceed. If the group is turning right onto a marked bike lane the length of time the light has been green may not be as important because cyclists have their own space.

3. When slowing down to stop at a traffic light, gear down so that you will be in the correct gear to proceed from a full stop. Move as far to the right of motor traffic as possible. Do not pass stopped vehicles on their right unless there is a bicycle lane. This is absolutely critical if the vehicle is planning to turn right at the intersection.

4. When stopped at a traffic light, all of the cyclists need to be as far right as possible, but alert and ready to go. This means straddling your bike with your pedals at “9 and 3 o’clock” which is parallel to the ground. Your dominant leg needs to be on the “9” side of the bike and ready to pedal at the first opportunity. As soon as the light changes put your foot on the forward pedal and as soon as the bike in front begins to move, push down and move forward. If you are slow to start and create a gap, the entire line is slower and it is much more likely that the people at the back will not get through the light and will have to wait for the next light.

Note: at a busy controlled intersection with crosswalks it is sometimes safest to act like pedestrians and walk your bikes in the crosswalk.

5. Four way stop signs present special issues: should the cyclists act as if they are one vehicle and all go through at once or should they go through as if each one is a vehicle? Going through one at a time in order would take a very long time, so usually even the vehicles want you to go through at once.

Very often a driver will signal you to go forward. If not, use your judgment based on the size of the group and their ability to get through quickly. It is usually impractical to go through the intersection single file, so doubling up to get through quicker is usually the better choice. Once through the intersection blend together as quickly as possible into a single line as you pick up speed. If traffic is backed up in all directions, it will probably work better if just a few go through at once so as not to anger stopped drivers who may believe you are moving out of turn.

6. An uncontrolled intersection is perhaps the most dangerous intersection because judgment and prudence on the part of both bicyclists and motorists is absolutely necessary. Always remember, in a collision the motor vehicle wins. It is seldom possible for everyone to dash through at the same time. All of the safety points in this section apply in spades at an uncontrolled intersection.

Note: at a railway crossing or grates on a road always cross at close to right angles to the rail, otherwise your front wheel may be trapped and you will be thrown off the bike. If crossing at right angle to the hazard is not practical, get off and walk (after calling out STOPPING). In addition, turning from a roadway to a driveway (or similar) often includes a small bump. This too requires you to come from far enough out on the road that you aren’t trapped into an acute angle approach.

**Understanding and using your bicycle properly**

1.  It is important to use your **gears** properly.  A bike is designed for you to ride in your middle front cog (if you have three) and about the middle of the back cluster of gears when you are rolling on flat terrain.  To go up a hill, gear down enough to maintain your normal leg cadence as much as possible.

2.  It is not good for your knees to pedal in too high a gear. Make sure you cycle in a gear that lets you maintain a cadence 80 or more rpm. It makes cycling more comfortable and easier on your knees.

3. It is also important to use your **brakes** properly. The left hand brake is the front brake.  The front brake supplies the most braking power.  When the rider brakes with the front brake you tend to move forward on the bike.  Braking too hard with the front brake can therefore destabilize the bike and could lead to a crash.  The rear brake is operated by the right hand.  It has less stopping power and so provides a more stable but slower stop.  It is recommended that both brakes be engaged at the same time to keep the bike upright and balanced while stopping effectively.

4. Always remember your **ABCs**. Check your **air pressure** frequently and keep it at the upper end of recommended air pressure for your tires (found on the side of most tires). Make sure your **brakes** are working properly, easy to apply, hitting your rims and not your tires, and the pads are gripping as they should. Finally, keep your **chain** well lubricated to help you pedal and shift gears smoothly and without straining your bike parts. Your chain stretches over time so your bike shop should checked it regularly.