

Ask the Chief

Dear Chief: Safe cohabitation of bicycles and cars are a constant challenge in nearly every city in America (including Alamosa). What are your thoughts on the matter?

Dear Concerned Citizen: Many times when there is conflict between bicycle and vehicular travel in communities residents and community leaders will seek to change or add laws, increase education and enforcement, or address street design and patterns. It has been my experience that all of this is critical, but careful consideration of data, comparison to community expectations, and available resources (money/people) should play a role before any wholesale change is made.

I recently had a conversation with a local bike enthusiast who brought forward a valid concern of bicycles riding on sidewalks (specifically, against the flow of vehicular traffic) in areas where it is currently permitted in our city. As the community member points out, this is unnatural and has in some cases resulted in accidents. My initial response was that this is an easy fix, we could simply prohibit bicycle travel on all sidewalks in our City, or as the community member suggests, prohibit bike travel on sidewalks in an opposing direction to vehicle traffic.

But are these the BEST answers? Before making any substantive changes we should consider how big the problem is, and if we fix the problem (change the law), are we in-turn creating a new problem? In the case of bicycle travel on sidewalks, if we prohibit bikes from being on sidewalks in total are we then forcing bikes onto roads that may not be conducive to safe bike travel as a result of current traffic design and patterns?

This discussion led me to further research. Since 2007, and according to Alamosa Police Department records, there have been a total of 5 accidents (bike vs. car) reported to us. All of these accidents occurred in different locations, at different days/times of the week, and there was no consistency as to who (cyclist or motorist) was at-fault. In review of the location data it is my opinion that without significant and costly street design improvements, it would be more problematic to completely restrict bike travel on all sidewalks.

So, where does this leave us? Regardless of the direction we take (or not), I am convinced the most effective and least financially impacting solution is community education, enforcement, and increasing tolerance of both modes of travel. As another citizen suggested we should provide training in our schools, continue teaching our children the laws and safe ways of travel on our roadways. Community members should strive to become more cognizant and respectful of each other's preferred methods of travel when sharing the roadway, and finally direct our (police) enforcement efforts in those areas and toward those persons where there is blatant disregard of state laws and municipal ordinances.

I have listed below several general reminders concerning bicycle and vehicle safety taken from the website: www.bicyclecolo.org

- Bicyclists have all the rights and duties applicable to the driver of any other vehicle and can be penalized for violating traffic laws.
- Obey traffic laws, signs and signals
- Ride in the right lane, except when passing another vehicle, preparing for a left turn or avoiding hazards
- Ride on paved shoulders and bike lanes when present and free of hazards
- Ride on the right, never ride against traffic
- Ride no more than two abreast, returning to single-file if riding two abreast would impede the flow of traffic
- On curving canyon roads without bike lanes or shoulders, play it safe and ride single file
- Use hand signals to indicate right or left turns, slowing or stopping
- Use a headlight, taillight and reflectors at night
- Act like a vehicle on the roads -- bicycles have the same rights and responsibilities
- Never assume motorists see you or that you have the right-of-way
- Wear appropriate gear to protect yourself: helmet, glasses and gloves
- Expect the unexpected; your first responsibility is to be safe

Note: No person shall ride a **bicycle** upon a **sidewalk** within the centralized business area of the City of Alamosa, which area, for the purposes of this section, shall comprise the **sidewalks** adjacent to the following streets: Those parts of Ross, Edison, San Juan, State, Hunt and Denver Avenues lying between the north **sidewalk** adjacent to Fourth Street and the south **sidewalk** adjacent to Sixth Street; those parts of Fourth, Main and Sixth Streets lying between the west **sidewalk** adjacent to Ross Avenue and the east **sidewalk** adjacent to Denver Avenue; and both **sidewalks** adjacent to the 1400 Block of Main Street.

Like all other public safety topics, I encourage community members to continue sending me your thoughts and ideas concerning this matter as well as others. Emails should be sent to cdodd@ci.alamosa.co.us.

Craig Dodd, Chief of Police