6 sharing the road

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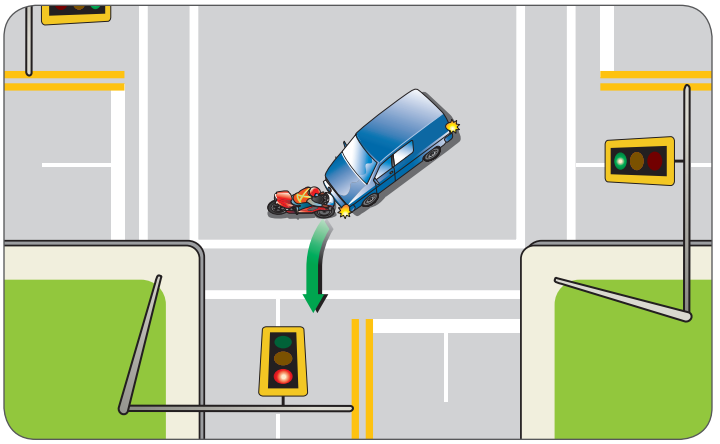
The last five chapters presented important driving information that can help you develop your smart driving skills. The next three chapters give suggestions on how you can apply this information to your driving. Knowing how to share the road is an important part of keeping safe when driving. In this chapter, you will learn who you share the road with and how to share the road safely with them.

Sharing the road safely

At the scene of a crash

Walter is speeding along Pine Street in his van. He's in a hurry to turn left at the intersection before the light turns. He gets into the intersection and quickly swings to the left. Jodi is riding her motorcycle along Pine Street in the opposite direction. She wants to go straight through, and she has just enough time to make it before the light turns yellow. Jodi assumes that Walter has seen her.

The result is a crash that seriously injures Jodi and sends Walter to the hospital with minor injuries.



Be aware of other road users who may want to use the space you plan to move into.

In this crash scene, both Walter and Jodi tried to move into the same space at the same time. By law, Walter should have stopped for Jodi before making his turn. But he didn't see the motorcycle coming. Jodi may have had the right-of-way, but she still should have looked carefully for vehicles in the intersection before riding through.

The way to avoid crashes is to make sure that the space you plan to move into will be empty. To share the road safely with others, use your **see-think-do** skills.

see-think-do

Use your observation skills. Scan the intersection from left to right, and left again, looking for hazards. Walter started across the intersection without checking to make sure the road was clear.

see-think-do

When another road user is approaching the space you were planning to use, you need to assess the risk, then choose the safest solution.

It's also important to know the right-of-way rules. When two or more road users want the same space, right-of-way rules tell you which road user should yield. However, other road users make mistakes and do unexpected things. It may not always be easy to decide who has the right-of-way. If in doubt, always be ready to give the right-of-way.

To learn more about right-of-way rules, turn to **chapter 4, rules of the road.**

think about

Think about how you'd feel if you injured or killed someone while you were driving. What difference would this make to the rest of your life? Who else would be affected?

see-think-do

Speed control

Drive at a safe speed. That way you will have time to stop if you need to.

Steering

Keep both hands on the outside of the wheel to maintain good steering control.

Space margins

If you keep well away from other road users, there will be less chance of space conflicts. You will have room to stop or to steer around if others start moving into your space.

Communication

Let other road users know what you are doing so they can react in time. Watch for communication from other road users.

How to share the road

Next time you are stopped at a busy intersection, look around and count the different types of road users you can see. You

share the roads with a number of different road users, including:

- pedestrians (for example, children, people in wheelchairs and traffic control people)
- cyclists
- motorcyclists
- drivers of:
  - passenger vehicles
  - large vehicles (for example, motorhomes and commercial vehicles)
  - buses (school and public transit)
  - emergency vehicles
  - trains.

To share the road safely, you need to use all of your **see-think-do** skills. You also need to understand how different road users use the road. The following sections highlight some of the main points to keep in mind for each type of road user.

Pedestrians

You always need to watch out for pedestrians. Like all road users, they can be unpredictable. You never know when a child might dash into the street, or someone might step out from behind a parked car. And pedestrians are often hard to see, especially at night.

see

Scan at crosswalks and intersections — many pedestrians are unaware of the distance it takes a vehicle to stop. They may suddenly step out onto the street without warning. Any time you approach a crosswalk or intersection:

- Be aware of vision blocks. Don't pass if you see a vehicle stopped at a crosswalk — it's illegal and unsafe. The driver could have stopped to let pedestrians cross the road.
- Don't enter a crosswalk without checking to see that it's empty, even when the light is green. Someone may be trying to dash across. People who find it difficult to cross the road quickly, such as the elderly, people with disabilities and parents walking with young children, may still be in the crosswalk.
- Watch out for pedestrians on the cross street whenever you make a turn.

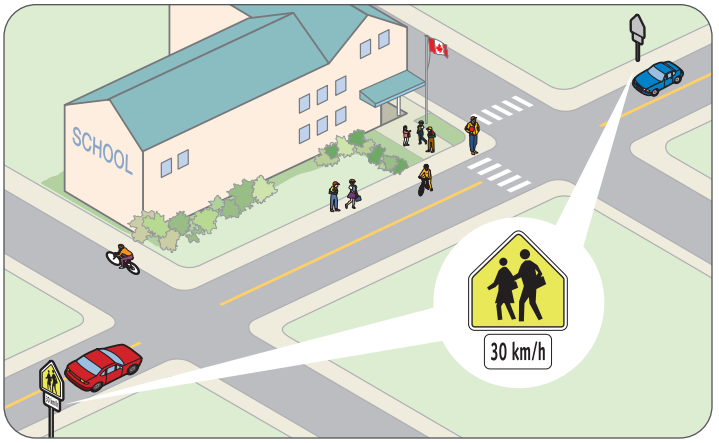
warning!

Crosswalks with flashing green lights are controlled by pedestrians. When you see a pedestrian standing near this type of crosswalk, you know that they have probably pressed the button and the light is about to change. Slow down and be prepared to stop.

Pay attention in school zones and playgrounds — observe carefully when driving in school and playground zones. Smaller children are harder to see than adults and are less predictable.

As you approach a school zone at a time when children may be arriving, leaving or taking their lunch hour, look well ahead for school patrols or crossing supervisors — you must obey them at all times.

For details on speed limits for school and playground zones, see **chapter 3, signs, signals and road markings.**



When you see a school zone sign with a 30 km/h posted speed, slow down to that speed. The speed limit is in effect between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. on school days, or the hours shown on the sign. When you reach the back of the school zone sign on the other side of the street, you'll know you have reached the end of the 30 km/h zone.

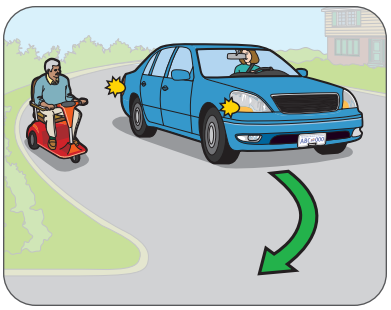
driving tip

You must always be prepared to stop if you see a pedestrian who is about to step out in front of you. But don't encourage crossing between intersections by stopping and inviting pedestrians to cross. The car behind you may not be expecting you to stop and may crash into you. Drivers in the other lanes may not see the pedestrians crossing in front of your vehicle and may hit them.

Observe carefully in residential areas — children and others may move in unpredicted ways. Remember, a ball or a hockey net can mean children are playing nearby.

Be especially careful if you're backing up. Check around your car before you get into it, then do a 360-degree vision check before moving. It's important to continue checking because you could easily back into a child or a family pet if you aren't observing carefully.

Watch for pedestrians with disabilities — take extra care if you see a person who's visually impaired. (They may be carrying a white cane or accompanied by a guide dog.) Often, they will raise their cane when they're uncertain about crossing the street safely. That is your signal to stop and give the person the right-of-way. Don't startle them or their guide dog by racing your engine or honking your horn.



People in motorized scooters or wheelchairs also share the roads. Technically, they should be on the sidewalk, but not all roads have sidewalks. Also, sidewalks may be too rough or narrow to travel on, or difficult to access.

Watch for people in motorized scooters or wheelchairs travelling along the side of the road, especially when you are planning to make a right turn.

think

Know the rules — you must yield to pedestrians:

- in marked crosswalks, if the pedestrian is close to your half of the road
- at intersections (pedestrians near your half of the road still have the right-of-way even when there is no marked crosswalk)
- when turning
- when entering a road from a driveway or alley.

It is always the driver's responsibility to avoid hitting a pedestrian.

do

Speed control and space margins

Slow down when you see pedestrians who might enter your path, and give them plenty of room.

Strategies: being a safe pedestrian

Just as drivers need to carefully observe for pedestrians, pedestrians also need to carefully observe for drivers. You can make yourself safer when you are walking by remembering a few simple rules:

- Do not leave the curb unless you are sure the approaching vehicles on the cross street have stopped or will stop.
- Watch for vehicles that are turning.
- Always hold a child's hand while crossing the street until they are old enough to understand safety rules.
- Do not start to cross if the traffic signal is flashing a warning (for example, an orange hand).
- Use crosswalks.
- Always activate the pedestrian crossing signal if there is one.

Cyclists

Cyclists commute to work as well as ride for recreation, so you can expect to see them on the road at any time of the day or night. Be aware that bicycle riders have the same rights and responsibilities on the road as drivers. Observe carefully at all times. Cyclists, like pedestrians, are vulnerable.

Be especially careful near children on bicycles. Children are used to adults watching out for them, so they tend to be unaware of danger. They also have poor peripheral vision, and often find it hard to judge the speed and distance of oncoming vehicles. They may not know the traffic rules or how much room it takes vehicles to stop.

see

Shoulder check — shoulder checking is important because bicycles and riders are narrow and can easily be hidden in your blind spot. Make sure you shoulder check before you:

- open your door to get out of your vehicle. Check your side mirror as well. One of the most common causes of crashes involving cyclists is drivers who swing their doors open without checking.
- pull away from the curb
- move to the right.

Pay attention at night — observe carefully, especially for bicycles coming in from side streets. Some cyclists may not have lights, reflectors or reflective gear.

Be careful when passing — before you pass another vehicle, make sure you check for oncoming cyclists and cyclists in front of the vehicle you are passing.

Scan at intersections — be especially careful to:

- Shoulder check for bicycles before turning right.
- Watch out for a cyclist ahead waiting to turn left if you're driving straight through.
- Check carefully for oncoming cyclists before making a left turn.
- Check carefully for cyclists crossing the road when coming to a place where a bicycle trail meets with a road.
- Be aware that a cyclist riding along the through road could be approaching faster than you think.

think

Know the rules — cyclists follow the same rules and regulations as drivers.

- Yield to cyclists as you would to any other vehicle. If you have the right-of-way at an intersection, proceed if it is safe. A cyclist will expect you to follow the rules of the road.
- Be aware that cyclists don't always stay on the right. To make a left turn, for instance, they need to move over to the left lane. If the lane is narrow, or if there is glass or a pothole

on the right, a cyclist has the right to move out toward the middle for safety.

- Pay attention to bicycle lanes. For more information about these lanes, see **chapter 4, rules of the road.**

driving tip

Even if you pull just slightly into another lane to pass, you are changing lanes. Remember to mirror check, signal and shoulder check.

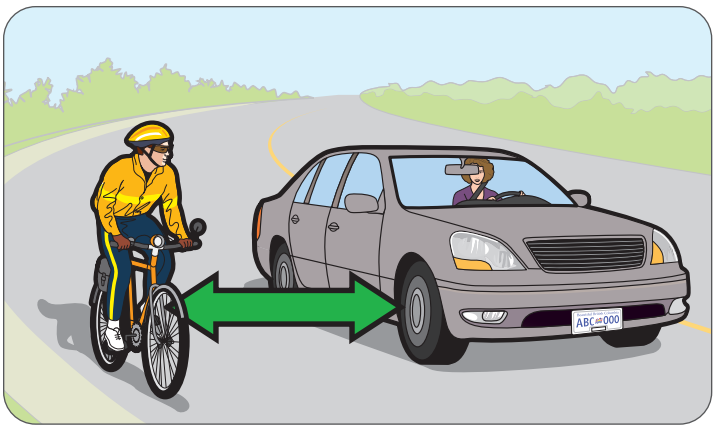
When passing a cyclist, pedestrian, or other vulnerable road user, slow down, pass when it is safe to do so and provide plenty of space. It is not only safer, but it is also the law.
You must leave at least 1.0 metre of space when passing a cyclist, pedestrian, or other road user, such as those using a personal mobility device. On roads with speed limits above 50 km/h, you must leave at least 1.5 meters when passing. If a person is on a sidewalk or protected cycle lane, you must leave at least 0.5 metre.

do

Space margins

Allow following distance — allow plenty of following distance. You need to be able to avoid hitting a cyclist who falls. Cyclists who wobble are probably inexperienced and are more likely to fall than experienced cyclists. Give them even more space than usual.

Allow side margins — a significant number of crashes involving cyclists result from side-swiping. Make sure there is enough space if you want to pass a cyclist. On a narrow road, wait for a clear, straight stretch that will allow you to pull out and give the cyclist room. Remember, you are allowed to cross a single solid yellow line when passing a cyclist, provided you can do it safely. On a multi-lane road, change lanes rather than risk crowding the cyclist.



Communication

Recognize hand signals — understand the hand signals that cyclists use. A cyclist may signal a right turn by extending the right arm straight out. For more information about hand signals, see the Turn signals section in **chapter 5, see-think-do.**

Make eye contact — a cyclist often uses eye contact to communicate. Make eye contact if you can. They are probably trying to anticipate your next move.

Avoid honking your horn — don't honk your horn at a cyclist unless you need to give a warning. A loud honk could startle a cyclist and even cause a fall.

Strategies: being a safe cyclist

If you are a cyclist, you're responsible for sharing the road in a way that keeps you and others safe.

Be predictable. Cyclists are more predictable if they follow the rules of the road.

Be visible. Because bicycles are narrow, you need to work at making yourself visible. Wear bright or reflective clothing, especially in the dark or in poor weather. Position yourself so drivers can see you. Avoid riding in blind spots.

Ride defensively. Think and look well ahead. Be assertive, but remember that a conflict between a cyclist and a motor vehicle usually results in injury to the cyclist.

Ride legally. In B.C., you must wear an approved bicycle helmet. If you ride at night, your bicycle must be equipped with a front white headlight visible at 150 metres, and have a rear red light and a red rear reflector.

Motorcycle riders

Like cyclists, motorcycle riders are vulnerable road users. They don't have the protection of an external frame, airbags or bumpers, and are sometimes difficult to see.

More than half of all motorcycle crashes result in injury or death.

see

Watch for clues — sometimes a motorcycle's turn signals are hard to see. Watch the rider for clues. If the rider shoulder checks or the motorcycle leans, the rider is probably planning to change lanes or turn.

Look carefully for bicycles and motorcycles when you drive through an intersection. Without good observation skills, the driver of the blue car might miss seeing the motorcycle.

Scan at intersections — look carefully for motorcycles when you come to an intersection:

- When you are turning left, look out for oncoming motorcycles. Motorcycles can be hard to see, especially at night, at dusk or in heavy traffic. It is also difficult to judge how fast they are approaching.
- When you are driving through an intersection, watch for an oncoming motorcycle that may be turning left.

do

Space margins

Allow side margins — never try to share a lane with a motorcycle. A motorcycle needs the whole lane to travel safely.

Allow following distance — allow at least three seconds of following distance when you are behind a motorcycle because:

- Motorcycles can stop very quickly.
- Motorcyclists can skid and fall because of poor road conditions. You need to leave plenty of room to stop safely.

Allow space when passing — allow plenty of space when you pass a motorcycle. Your vehicle may throw dirt or water in the rider's face.

Communication

Make eye contact — establish eye contact whenever possible.

Read vehicle language — don't assume that a rider in the left part of the lane is planning to turn left. Motorcyclists often ride in the left part of the lane to make themselves more visible.

Passenger vehicles

When you drive, you will interact with the drivers of cars, vans and small trucks. Drivers of passenger vehicles can be just as unpredictable as other road users. They may not always look ahead. Their vehicles may not be well maintained — for example, their brakes and signal lights may not be working properly. And some drivers may be tired, impatient or impaired.

Use all of your **see-think-do** skills to observe and respond safely to other passenger vehicles.

Large vehicles

Large vehicles operate quite differently than cars. Give them lots of room.

do

Space margins

Allow following distance — a big vehicle can prevent you from seeing hazards ahead. You'll have a wider range of vision if you increase your following distance.

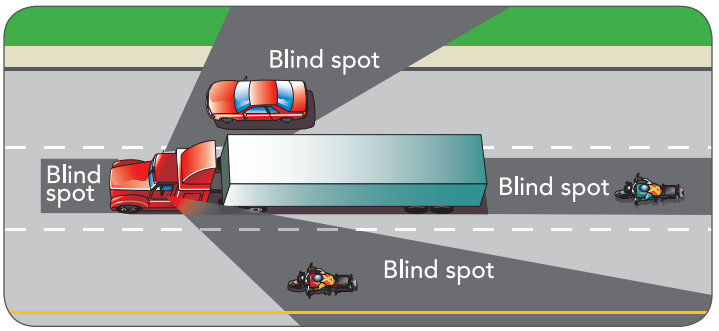
If you are stopped facing uphill behind a large vehicle, remember that it may roll backwards when the driver releases the brake. Leave extra space in front of your vehicle.

In rainy weather, large vehicles can spray dirt or water onto your windshield, reducing your vision. Their tires may also spray up rocks that could hit your vehicle. Staying well back will help prevent this.

You will see this sign on the back of some vehicles. It is used to indicate vehicles that will be moving slowly. Keep your distance and pass only when you are certain it is safe.

When you see this sign or a Wide Load, Long Load or Oversize Load sign on a truck or pilot car, it indicates that an oversize load is being transported.

Keep clear of blind spots — there are large blind spots both behind and beside large vehicles. Make sure you keep out of the blind spots, otherwise the driver will not see you. You should be able to see both mirrors of the truck or bus in front of you. Never try to sneak behind a truck if it is backing into a loading bay or out of a driveway — you will enter one of the truck driver's blind spots and risk being hit.



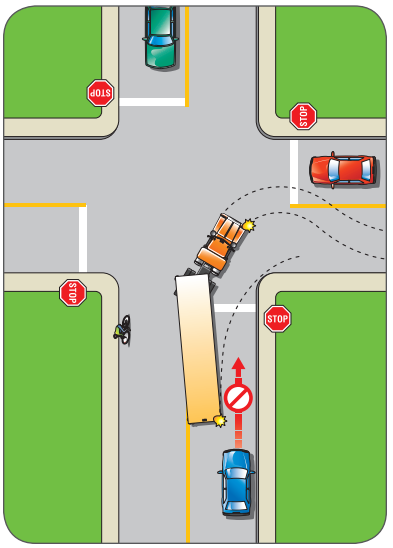
When travelling near a large vehicle, think about whether the driver can see you — avoid travelling in blind spots.

Allow space when passing — you need a lot of space when passing. Remember that trucks are long — some pull two trailers. Don't pass unless you are sure you have enough space.

If you pass a large vehicle, or make a lane change in front of one, remember to leave extra room before you pull in. Big vehicles take longer to slow down. Make sure you can see the truck's headlights in your rear-view mirror before you re-enter the lane, and maintain your speed once you get there.

If you see a truck starting to slow down well before a red light, remember that the driver requires all of that space to stop in time. Never move into that space — you could be rear-ended.

Make room for turns — big vehicles need a lot of room to turn. When they turn right, you may be squeezed between the truck and the curb.



You may also have a space problem if you are on a road that a large vehicle is turning onto. The driver may need to cross the centre line or cut a corner in order to complete a turn. Again, keep your distance.

Avoid turbulence — big vehicles create turbulence that can push you away from the vehicle or pull you towards it. Turbulence can cause problems when you are passing a big truck, or when you meet one coming toward you. Allow lots of space on the side, and keep a firm grip on the steering wheel.

driving tip

Many of the back roads of B.C. are logging roads. Observe carefully if you are driving on one of these roads. Turn on your headlights for maximum visibility if your vehicle doesn't have daytime running lights. Be especially cautious when approaching a curve or a hill. Always yield to logging trucks.

Avoid being on the right of a large vehicle if there's a chance it might turn right.

Communication

Read vehicle language — many large vehicles are equipped with engine retarders that slow the vehicle down without the use of brakes. Truck drivers also use their gears to slow down. This means the truck or bus ahead of you could slow down without the brake lights going on. Look ahead and listen for a change in the truck's engine noise.

Watch for signs that a large vehicle is about to back up — a horn or beeper, four-way flashers or backup lights.

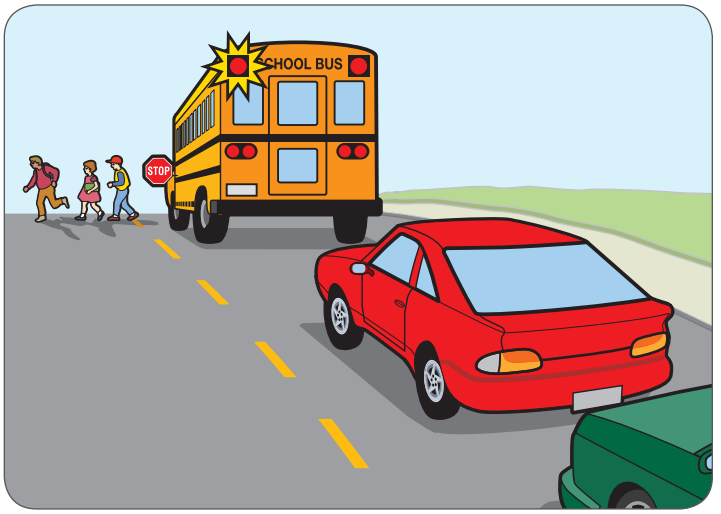
Signal well ahead — if you are ahead of a large vehicle, signal well before you slow down, turn or stop. Large vehicles need lots of time to slow down.

School buses

see

Watch for clues — a school bus that has stopped to let children off has lights at the top that flash alternately, and sometimes a swing-out stop sign. The school bus driver may have turned on alternating flashing amber lights when preparing to stop.

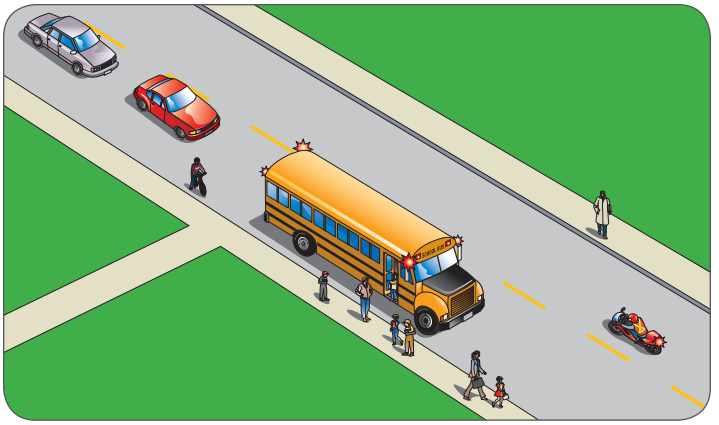
You must stop in either direction whenever you see flashing red lights on a school bus.



think

Know the rules — when you see a school bus with alternating flashing red lights at the top, you must stop whether you are approaching it from the front or the rear. Vehicles in all lanes must stop.

After stopping for a school bus, don't start moving again until the bus moves on or the driver signals that it's safe by turning off the lights and pulling in the stop sign.



Public transit buses

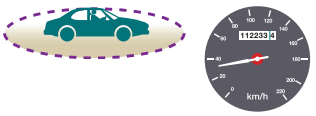
see

Watch for buses that have stopped — they may block your view of pedestrians about to cross the street, or they may be about to pull into traffic.

think

Know the rules — you must allow a public transit bus that is signalling and displaying a yield-to-bus sign to move out from the curb lane or a bus stop. This rule applies to all roads where the speed limit is 60 km/h or lower.

do



Space margins and speed control

Change lanes to let a bus pull out if there is space in the next lane, or slow down if you can't change lanes safely.

Emergency vehicles

Emergency vehicles include police cars, ambulances and fire trucks.

see

Listen for sirens and watch for flashing lights — look to see where the emergency vehicle is coming from. Once the vehicle has passed, watch and listen because there may be others.

think

Know the rules — emergency vehicles displaying flashing lights and sirens always have the right-of-way. All traffic moving in both directions must stop. (Exception: if you are on a divided highway and the emergency vehicle is approaching on the other side of the median, you may not need to stop. Make sure that it would be impossible for the emergency vehicle to move onto your side of the highway.)

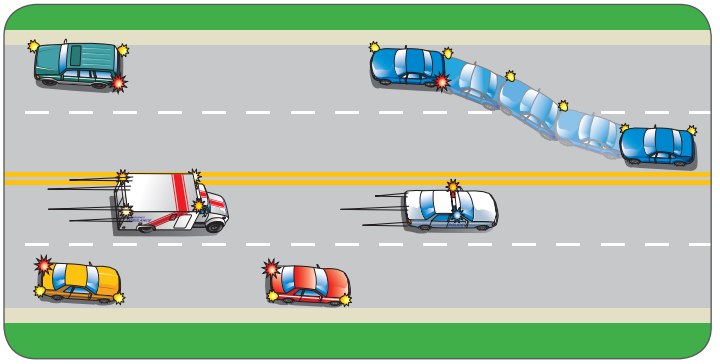
Clear a path — don't block the path of emergency vehicles. Usually the best thing to do is pull over to the right and stop (or to the left if you're driving in the left lane of a divided highway or on a one-way street). Do not stop in an intersection. Think well ahead, and have a plan in mind to create a path for the emergency vehicle.

It is illegal to drive over a fire hose.

driving tip

If you are stopped at an intersection and you are blocking the path of the emergency vehicle, you may have to turn the corner to get out of the way.

All vehicles on both sides of the road must pull over to leave a clear path whenever an emergency vehicle uses its siren and flashing lights.



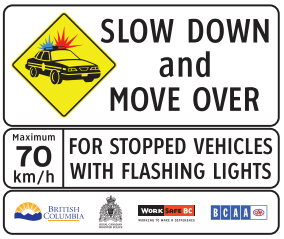
do

Space margins and speed control

Allow following distance — when you're following a fire truck, you must stay back at least 150 metres.

Communication

Signal — use your turn signal to let the emergency vehicle driver know you have seen the vehicle and are pulling over.



Stopped vehicles with flashing lights

Drivers must slow down and leave plenty of room when passing stopped vehicles displaying flashing lights to make highways safer for law enforcement, emergency personnel and other roadside workers. This rule applies to all vehicles authorized to display flashing yellow, red, white or blue lights, including those used by fire departments, law enforcement, commercial vehicle inspectors, conservation officers, paramedics, tow truck operators, highway maintenance workers, utility workers, land surveyors, animal control workers and garbage collectors.

fast fact

Failure to change lanes and/or slow down when passing a stopped vehicle displaying flashing lights may result in a traffic violation and penalty points.

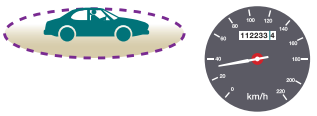
see

Watch for – vehicles with flashing lights on the side of the road.

think

Know the rules – all traffic must slow down when approaching stopped vehicles displaying flashing lights. When approaching these types of vehicles, you must drive no faster than 70 km/h if the speed limit is 80 km/h or more, and no faster than 40 km/h if the speed limit is less than 80 km/h. (Exception: this rule does not apply if you are on a divided highway and approaching the vehicle with flashing lights from the opposite direction.)

If you are in the lane nearest to the stopped vehicle displaying flashing lights, you must also change lanes if safe to do so.

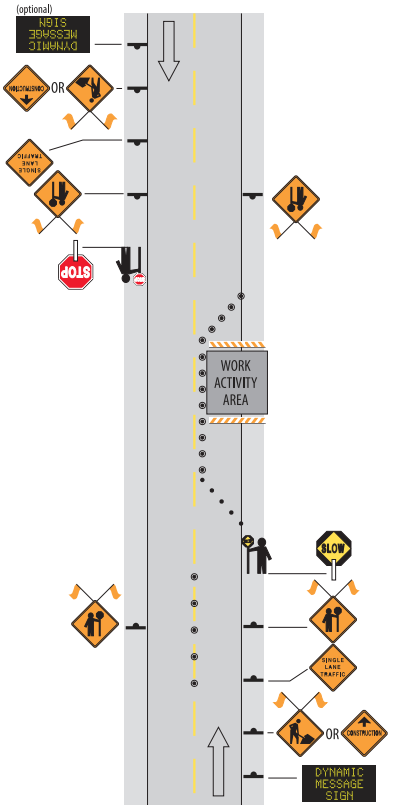


do

Space margins and speed control

Slow down and leave space when passing vehicles with flashing lights on the sides of roads. Change lanes to provide safe space margins if it is safe to do so.

Construction zones



Road crews work throughout the year to maintain and improve our roads.

Despite construction zone signs and traffic control persons, crashes still occur in construction zones, mainly because some drivers don't pay attention.

see

Scan ahead — look for construction zones ahead and be prepared to obey traffic control devices within the zone.

Pay attention at night — road construction doesn't just occur in the daytime. With the high daytime traffic volumes, more and more road construction takes place at night. You need to pay extra attention and drive extra slowly through construction zones at night.

Look around — just because you don't immediately see traffic control persons, construction or workers in a construction zone doesn't mean they are not there. Be alert for traffic control persons, construction workers and equipment.

think

Know the rules — you must obey the directions of traffic control persons and road construction signs from the start to the end of the construction zone. Construction zone speed limits apply 24 hours a day when posted.

Think ahead — construction zones often require lane closures, so you may need to change lanes. Merge to avoid a lane closure as soon as you can. This will help maintain traffic flow.

Plan ahead — expect delays, and plan for them by leaving early to reach your destination on time. Construction crews aren't there to personally inconvenience you — they are

improving the roads for everyone. Check radio, television and websites for the latest traffic reports and updates to find out what is happening on the roads within your area, and along your intended route. Consider taking an alternate route.

do

Space margins and speed control

Slow down — the road surface may be uneven or unpaved, so you need to slow down. You must obey construction zone speed limits. Traffic fines are double in construction zones.

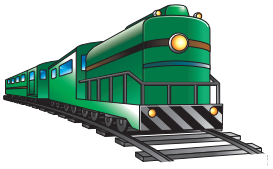
Stop when directed — stop when directed to do so by traffic control persons or other traffic control devices. In some construction zones, you may need to wait for a pilot car to escort you through the work zone.

Allow following distance — leave plenty of following distance between your vehicle and the vehicle immediately ahead. Avoid changing lanes in a construction zone.

Allow side margins — leave space between you, the construction crews and their equipment in the construction zones.

driving tip

Unnecessary idling wastes gas and causes emissions that degrade air quality and contribute to climate change. If you are directed to stop in a construction zone, turn off the engine. Idling for more than 10 seconds costs more than turning the engine off.



Trains

Every year people die or are seriously injured in collisions between vehicles and trains, so you need to be careful when approaching a railway crossing. Most trains require approximately two kilometres to stop — never try to beat one.

see

Watch for clues — lots of clues warn you of a railway crossing ahead:

- **Advance warning signs** — these signs alert you to an upcoming crossing, and tell you to look, listen and slow down because you may have to stop. They are usually posted in locations where you cannot see an upcoming railway crossing (for example, on hilly or curvy roads). An advisory speed sign below the advance warning sign may show that the safe road speed is less than the posted speed.

- **Pavement markings** — at the approach to some railway crossings, you may see a painted "X" on the pavement. Some crossings also have flashing lights, a bell and gates. If the light and bell are activated or the gate is down, it means a train is approaching.

You may not be able to see a train coming if visibility is poor, but you may hear its whistle. But remember that trains are not required to sound a whistle at every crossing.

Observe carefully — be aware that your eyes may mislead you. Trains often seem to be moving much slower than they really are. Passenger trains travel at up to 160 km/h in Canada.

Be especially careful at night. Half of all nighttime collisions between trains and cars involve vehicles hitting the side of a train because the driver didn't see it.

Check for other road users — watch out for other road users at railway crossings. Motorcycle riders and cyclists may have to swerve to cross the tracks safely. They could slip and fall on wet tracks, so be sure to cover your brake and leave extra room.

Watch for a second train — be aware that there is often more than one track, so watch out for a second train. One of the main causes of car and train crashes is that the driver doesn't wait for the second train that is hidden behind the first one.

warning!

Expect a train on a track at any time. Trains don't always follow regular schedules.

driving tip

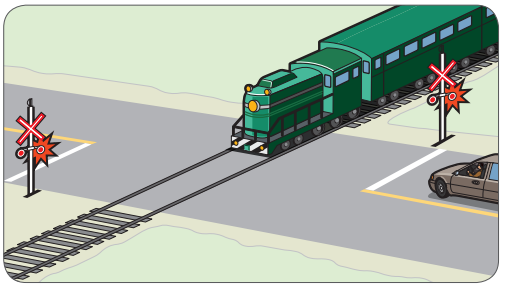
When there is a red traffic light at an intersection on the other side of a railway crossing, do not stop on the tracks. Stop before the railway crossing unless there is room on the other side.

think

Know the rules — trains always have right of way. They don't slow down for crossings. If there is a gate down, you must stop and wait for it to go up before you cross the tracks. If flashing red lights are displayed at the crossing, you must stop. Move across the tracks only when it's safe. If a flag person directs you to stop, you must obey their directions. If you hear or see a train approaching the crossing, stop and don't proceed until it is safe.

Think ahead — if your vehicle is stuck on the track, you will have to think and act quickly. Get all passengers out of the vehicle. Move quickly at least 30 metres away from the track to avoid flying debris. Then phone for help:

- Transport Canada — look for the phone number on the back of the railway crossing sign
- 911 or the local police.



Stop no closer than five metres and no further than 15 metres from the nearest rail.

Note: Report the location that's on the back of the railway crossing sign.

do

Speed control

Travel at a safe speed — you should always be able to stop within the distance lit by your headlights if you're driving at night.

Gear down — if you are driving a vehicle with a standard transmission, change to a lower gear before you begin to cross. Never change gears on the crossing because you could stall the vehicle.

Space margins

Allow following distance — never get trapped on a crossing. When traffic is heavy, wait until you can clear the crossing before moving ahead.

Horses

Horses may be ridden on most public roads.

see

Scan ahead — look for horses and riders.

think

Know the rules — horse riders and horse carriage operators have the same rights as motor vehicle operators and must obey the same rules.

Know the hazards — horses can be startled by sudden movement or noise. The rider may not be able to control the horse.

do

Space margins

Slow down — go slowly when approaching a horse and rider or horse and carriage. Allow plenty of following distance.

Allow space when passing — leave extra room when passing them.

Pass carefully — horses may be startled by sudden movement or noise. Avoid sounding your horn, and pass carefully and slowly.

Prepare to stop — if a rider is having trouble controlling their horse, stop. It's better to wait until the horse is back under the rider's control than to risk passing them.