

# 5 Sharing the Road Safely – Be Courteous!

Drivers of all ages need to be concerned with traffic laws, courtesy and safety. This chapter reminds you that you share the road with a variety of traffic such as commercial trucks, emergency vehicles, motorcycles, mopeds, bicyclists and pedestrians. It is important to be patient with all who use the road. The material presented here also will help you understand how to drive in a manner that reduces the risk of a traffic crash and the risk of road rage.

Safe driving involves more than learning the basics of operating a vehicle and memorizing the rules of the road. Safe driving also requires good judgment and reflexes, experience, patience and common sense. A young driver's understanding and judgment may not be as well developed as an experienced driver's. Middle-aged drivers may grow complacent about their driving ability after years of driving. Older drivers have years of experience on the road but may face challenges brought about by losses in vision, hearing, attentiveness, decision-making ability or reaction time. Research indicates older drivers can improve their driving ability through additional training, enabling them to maintain their driver's license while driving safely. Some communities offer driving skill programs for older drivers.

## **DISTRACTED DRIVING**

The U.S. Department of Transportation's National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that there are at least 3,000 deaths annually from distracted-driving crashes – crashes in which drivers lost focus on the safe control of their vehicles due to manual, visual or cognitive distraction.

While this statistic is significant, it may understate the size of the problem since identifying the distraction and its role in a crash can be difficult.

Most drivers understand the responsibility of getting behind the wheel and avoiding risky behaviors. Distracted drivers who drive “in a careless or negligent manner likely to endanger any person or property” or “in willful or wanton disregard for the safety of persons or property” are subject to prosecution under Michigan law.

Texting while driving is illegal in Michigan and this includes reading, typing or sending a text message. Exceptions are in place for reporting crashes, crimes or other emergencies. Drivers face a fine of \$100 for a first offense and \$200 for subsequent violations.

Anything that takes your eyes off the road, your hands off the wheel or your mind off your driving can be a big problem. Studies show that your brain cannot give full attention to more than one activity at a time. Even seemingly simple tasks such as tuning a radio can be risky, especially in bad weather or heavy traffic. In the estimated quarter of a second it takes the brain to shift attention between two tasks, a car going 65 mph covers 24 feet.

Here are some ways you can minimize in-vehicle distractions.

**Before driving:**

- Designate a front-seat passenger to serve as a “copilot” to help with maps or navigation systems. If you are driving alone, map out destinations in advance.
- Be familiar with equipment in the vehicle. Practice performing basic functions such as adjusting the temperature or radio settings without taking your eyes off the road.
- Preprogram your favorite radio stations for easy access and arrange tapes and CDs in an easy-to-reach spot.
- Ensure all children are comfortable and properly buckled up. Teach them the importance of good behavior and remaining buckled up while in a vehicle. Do not underestimate how distracting it can be to tend to them in the car.
- Complete any personal grooming before you start driving or after you reach your destination.

### **While driving:**

- Make driving your priority. A momentary distraction can lead to a crash. Keep your hands on the wheel and your eyes on the road.
- Avoid using mobile phones, texting devices, navigation systems and other electronic gadgets.
- If you must use a mobile phone, make your call while your vehicle is safely parked. Avoid calling others who are driving.
- Do not take notes, read or look up phone numbers.
- Avoid involved, stressful or confrontational conversations.
- If you must eat, choose easy-to-handle items and make sure drinks are secured in cup holders.
- Take a break if you find yourself “lost in thought” or tired.

## **SHARING THE ROAD**

When driving, you'll share the road with pedestrians, bicyclists, trucks, farm tractors, road repair and snow removal equipment to mention a few.

### **Keep the following guidelines in mind when driving:**

- Be alert and use extra care when sharing the road with pedestrians, bicycles, motorcycles and mopeds. They are small and hard to see. Keep in mind that children are especially unpredictable in their movements and may be hard to spot due to their small size.
- Watch for delivery and commercial vehicles that make frequent stops. Allow more following distance than usual.
- Check your mirrors and look over your shoulder for traffic when pulling out from curb-side parking or driveways.
- Be alert and listen for all-terrain vehicles and snowmobiles and watch for trail or crosswalk signs along the roadway.

## **PEDESTRIANS**

As a driver, watch out and always yield the right-of-way to people walking, jogging, biking, crossing a street in the middle of a block or darting from between parked vehicles. Watch for them when

entering a street from a driveway or alley, at stop signs, traffic signals, roundabouts, crosswalks and intersections.

Take extra care when people with disabilities are crossing the road. Be on high-alert for children entering the street when driving near schools, playgrounds or residential neighborhoods.



After a traffic light turns green, yield to people crossing a street or vehicles that may still be turning in front of you or crossing the intersection. Even if traffic lights or crosswalks are not present, drivers must still yield the right-of-way to a pedestrian crossing the roadway. Never attempt to pass any vehicle that has stopped to allow a pedestrian to cross. Drivers must take every possible precaution to avoid a collision with pedestrians.

Motorists are cautioned that pedestrians are likely to cross in the middle of the block, whether or not a crosswalk is present.

Mid-block crosswalks provide pedestrians with safe crossing along roadways at places other than intersections. (See Figure 5-1.) A yield line is sometimes used to indicate the location where drivers should stop for pedestrians in the crosswalk.

When there are no sidewalks, pedestrians should walk on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic. Parents should teach their children this, but drivers must watch for pedestrians.

Be alert for joggers running along roadways. Joggers should wear reflective clothing, use sidewalks or roadway shoulders and avoid jogging at night, dawn, dusk or during bad weather. Joggers, like other pedestrians, should be on the side of the road facing oncoming traffic.

**Blind pedestrians:** Michigan law requires you to stop or yield the right-of-way when you see a pedestrian with a white cane or guide dog. Only the blind may carry white canes. Avoid honking the horn or revving the engine; these noises are distracting and cover important audible cues used by the blind. Also avoid blocking designated crosswalks. This makes it especially difficult for a visually impaired or blind person to cross the street. It is also an inconvenience for

others attempting to cross and violates the rule of always yielding to pedestrians.

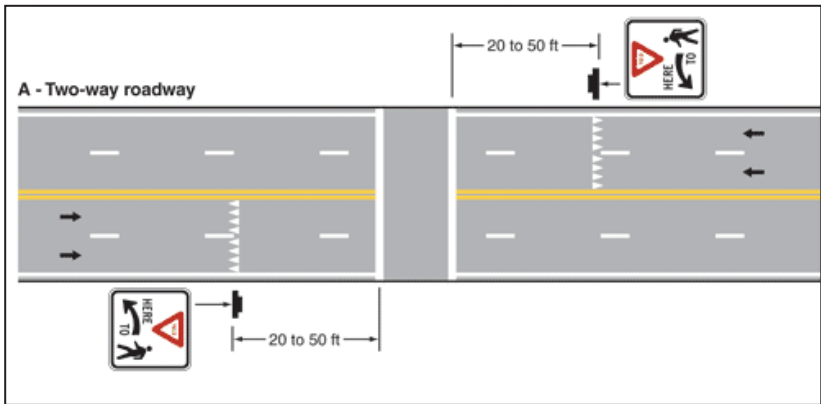


Figure 5-1 – Mid-block Crosswalk

## EMERGENCY VEHICLES

Yield the right-of-way to an emergency vehicle that is approaching from any direction or has stopped when it is displaying flashing warning lights or sounding a siren or other audible warning or both.



### **An authorized emergency vehicle includes:**

- Ambulances, fire department and police vehicles, privately owned vehicles of volunteer or paid fire fighters if authorized by the chief of an organized fire department, privately owned motor vehicles of volunteer or paid members of a life-support agency.
- A vehicle owned and operated by a federally recognized, nonprofit charitable organization that is used exclusively for assistance during that emergency.
- A tow truck or wrecker with a flashing, rotating or oscillating red or amber light that is clearly marked and readily recognizable as a vehicle used to assist disabled vehicles.

Failure to yield or exercise due caution when passing a stopped emergency vehicle is a misdemeanor. In addition, it is a felony to injure or kill emergency personnel for failure to yield or exercise due caution when passing a stationary emergency vehicle.

**When you see a stopped emergency vehicle:**

- Slow down and move over a lane if possible. If traffic or other conditions prevent you from changing lanes, you must slow down and proceed with due caution.

**When an emergency vehicle is approaching:**

- Pull over to the edge of the roadway, clear of intersections and stop.
- Remain there until the emergency vehicle has passed. Stay alert – more than one emergency vehicle may be responding to the call.
- Keep a foot on the brake so the brake lights let emergency vehicle drivers know you have stopped.
- Stay at least 500 feet behind any moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing warning lights and sounding a siren.
- Never pass a moving emergency vehicle displaying flashing warning lights unless directed to do so by the emergency vehicle driver or a law enforcement officer.

## COMMERCIAL VEHICLES

When a commercial vehicle such as a truck or a bus collides with smaller vehicles, people in the smaller vehicles are much more likely to be severely injured or killed.

**Motorists should understand the following about commercial vehicles:**

- Commercial vehicle drivers cannot stop or maneuver their vehicles as easily as a passenger vehicle. They take longer to stop. A passenger vehicle traveling at 55 mph can stop in about 130 feet to 140 feet. A commercial vehicle traveling at the same speed takes 400 feet to stop.
- Commercial vehicle drivers may not be able to see traffic directly in front of, alongside or close behind their vehicles.

Large commercial trucks have blind spots or “no zones,” spaces in which motorists should not linger because they are not readily visible to the commercial driver. By hanging out in a commercial vehicle’s “no zones,” you are essentially hidden from the truck driver and this increases the chances that the truck could hit you when it is changing lanes or turning. These “no zones” are in the front, behind and on both sides of the commercial vehicle. Stay out of the “no zones.” (See Figure 5-2.)

- Commercial vehicles need room to make right turns. They may swing wide to the left to safely negotiate a right turn. When you see a commercial vehicle with its right turn signal on at an intersection, know that the truck is going to make a wide right turn. Do not try to pass on the right-hand side or you might get squeezed between the truck and the curb. Stay behind trucks making right turns.

These factors are the result of size and weight differences between the two types of vehicles, but vehicle size and weight do not cause crashes – drivers do.

**Remember to:**

- Keep a safe distance behind a truck or bus. Following a commercial vehicle too closely greatly increases the chances of a rear-end collision. When your passenger vehicle is right behind a commercial vehicle, the driver cannot see it and it severely limits what you can see on the road ahead. Extend

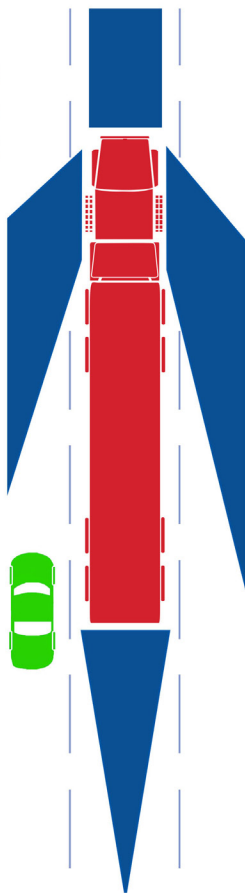


Figure 5-2  
“No zones”  
shown in  
blue.

the distance between your vehicle and a commercial vehicle as weather or road conditions deteriorate.

- When following a commercial vehicle, observe its turn signals before trying to pass. Cutting in between a commercial vehicle and the curb or shoulder to the right may result in a crash. If the commercial vehicle appears to be starting a left turn, wait and verify which way the driver is signaling before passing on the right.
- Signal intended lane changes or turns well in advance. Never cut off a commercial vehicle, force it to slow down or stop suddenly.
- Be careful when passing a commercial vehicle. Often, commercial vehicle drivers cannot see you. Allow enough time and distance to pass safely.
- Roundabouts: Try not to pass or drive next to large vehicles.
- Pass commercial vehicles on the left side and maintain a consistent speed when passing. Be sure you can see the entire cab of the truck in your rearview mirror before signaling and pulling in front of the commercial vehicle.
- When passing a commercial vehicle or when one passes you, keep both hands on the steering wheel. Trucks can create strong air flow and draft when traveling at high speeds.
- Never cross behind a commercial vehicle that is preparing to back up or is backing up. Remember, most trailers are eight-and-a-half feet wide and can hide a car completely, preventing the truck driver from even seeing your vehicle.
- Stay behind the white stopping lines. They are there for a reason. If you stop past the line, commercial vehicles will not be able to complete their turns without hitting you.
- When merging onto the freeway, commercial vehicles may not be able to move over, so match the flow of traffic as closely as possible, pick your spot and go.
- When exiting the freeway, leave space between you and the vehicle in front of you. Plan your move early and always signal your intentions as soon as possible.



- Be even more careful passing a truck with a trailer. Often, a driver must swing out to the left or right before making a turn. The driver may not see you and could force you off the road.
- Slow down if a truck or bus is passing you, especially during bad weather. Splash or spray from their tires can reduce visibility. Start your wipers before the vehicle passes.
- At night, use your low beams when following a truck or bus.

## MOTORCYCLES, MOPEDS AND BICYCLES

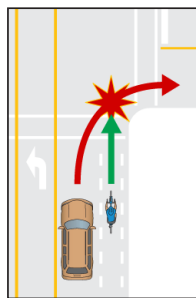
Motorists should keep a sharp eye out for motorcyclists, moped riders and bicyclists. While their smaller size may make these two-wheeled and (for some motorcycles) three-wheeled vehicles economical to operate, it also makes it difficult to judge their speed and distance, putting them at an increased risk of being hit. Any crash between a larger vehicle and a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist almost always injures or kills the operator of the smaller vehicle.

**When driving, remember these important points about motorcycles, mopeds and bicycles:**

- Always treat motorcyclists, moped riders and bicyclists with courtesy. Bicyclists may legally ride on Michigan roads, except limited access freeways, and have the same rights and responsibilities as other motorists.
- It is illegal to drive beside a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist in the same lane. But, two motorcyclists, moped riders or bicyclists may drive side by side in the same lane.
- Intersections are one of the most common locations for crashes between vehicles and motorcyclists, moped riders or bicyclists. Exercise extreme caution when making a left turn at an intersection. Be alert for possible oncoming motorcyclists, moped riders and bicyclists. Left turns present a higher risk for crashes because it is easy for motorists to overlook oncoming motorcyclists, moped riders or bicyclists due to their smaller profile and speed.

- Pass a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist as you would another vehicle, but not so fast or so close that your tires throw dirt or stones into the rider's face or that a draft from your vehicle blows the motorcycle, moped or bicycle about. Never attempt to squeeze by the rider. A good rule when passing a bicyclist is to allow at least three feet of space between your side mirror and the rider. Five feet of space is recommended for higher speed roads or if a group of riders is present. Large vehicles should allow even more space when passing.
- Before changing lanes, check to see if a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist is in your blind spot or in the space where you plan to move. After you pass, look again before you move back into the other lane. Make sure you can see the rider clearly in your rearview mirror. Many crashes happen because motorists failed to check their blind spots and didn't see the motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist.
- Leave plenty of extra space between your vehicle and a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist ahead. They can usually stop in shorter distances than a car and may have to swerve suddenly to avoid obstacles.
- Allow extra maneuvering room in areas with potholes, pavement transitions and railroad crossings. Motorcyclists, moped riders or bicyclists may need to slow down, stop or adjust their lane position to avoid hazards.
- A fast moving vehicle creates a lot of airflow and draft around it. Be mindful that your vehicle's "wind blast" can startle or even push a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist off balance, increasing the chances of a crash.
- Check for turn signals or hand signals from a motorcyclist, moped rider or bicyclist. Not all of their vehicles are equipped with turn signals. Watch for other clues as to whether the vehicle intends to turn, such as the operator and passenger turning their heads to look behind or beginning to lean or tilt their vehicle.

- The single headlight or taillight on a motorcycle, moped or bicycle can blend into the lights of other vehicles.
- When parking your vehicle, check your mirrors before opening your door. Opening a vehicle door in the path of approaching traffic, including motorcyclists, moped riders and bicyclists, is dangerous and illegal.
- Use your horn judiciously. Avoid loud blasts that may startle riders and put them at an increased risk of a crash.
- Look for bicyclists riding from behind on the road shoulder or in a bike lane before turning right at an intersection, into a driveway or pulling off the road. As appropriate, yield and allow them to pass before turning. Do not overtake a bicyclist and turn right unless it is safe to do so.
- Obey all lane markings. Do not use a bicycle lane as a passing or turning lane.



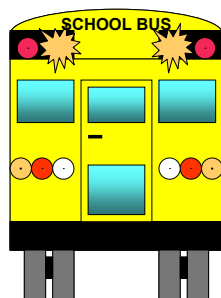
## SCHOOL BUSES

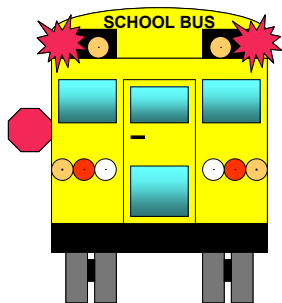
It is not necessary to stop for a school bus stopped on the other side of a divided highway where the road is separated by a barrier, such as a concrete or grass median, island or other structures that separate the flow of traffic. Use extra care around buses and in school zones. Children are small and hard to see and may dart into the street or out from around parked vehicles.

Fines for failing to stop for a school bus are double what would normally be assessed for a moving violation. Increased fines and imprisonment may result for violations resulting in injury or death.

**When the YELLOW overhead lights are flashing:**

- When the yellow overhead lights are flashing, prepare to stop.



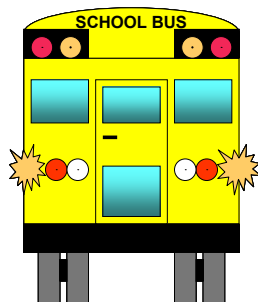


**When the RED overhead lights are flashing :**

- When the red overhead lights are flashing, stop at least 20 feet from the school bus.
- Remain stopped until the flashing red lights are turned off or the bus resumes its travels.

**When the YELLOW hazard lights are flashing:**

- When the yellow hazard lights are flashing, proceed with caution.



## AGGRESSIVE DRIVING

Watch for aggressive drivers. Aggressive drivers run stop signs and red lights, speed, tailgate, weave their vehicles in and out of traffic, pass on the right and may make improper hand gestures. They sometimes yell at you, honk their horns or flash their headlights. If you respond equally, the situation may get out of control and escalate into road rage, in which a weapon or the vehicle itself is used to assault the other driver.

Aggressive drivers' actions place them and other motorists at an increased risk for crashes. We have all seen aggressive drivers. They disregard their own safety as well as that of others. Do not be an aggressive driver. Be courteous and aware of the traffic around you. Take a moment to think about the driving behaviors that bother you and to assess your own driving. If the driving behaviors that upset you are also present in your own driving, then there is a chance that your driving could be upsetting to other drivers.

The exact number of traffic crashes caused by aggressive drivers is unknown, but the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration

has estimated 66 percent of all traffic fatalities are caused by aggressive driving behaviors.

**Avoid the following behaviors:**

- **Merging improperly.** Failing to merge smoothly disrupts the flow of traffic. Always try to merge smoothly when entering the expressway or turning from one road to another. If you see a driver making an ill-advised merge or turn, slow down and give him or her room. Getting angry will not help and your anger could adversely affect your judgment, resulting in a crash. A driver may be wrong, but how important is it to prove you are right? Do not risk injury or death because you feel you have been wronged when driving. It is much wiser to back off and allow the driver to merge.
- **Driving slowly in the left lane.** Use all lanes properly and obey the speed limit. If you are using the left-hand lane to pass slower traffic and someone tailgates you, move back into the right-hand lane when it is safe to do so and allow the faster traffic to move ahead. Driving in the left-hand lane and allowing traffic to build up behind you increases the chances aggressive drivers may take careless risks attempting to get around you.
- **Tailgating.** This is another aggressive-driver trait. If other drivers tailgate you, pull over and let them pass. It is better to have these unsafe drivers in front where you can see them rather than having them driving on your rear bumper.
- **Gestures.** Never gesture at other drivers when you become angry. If another driver is gesturing to you when you have made a driving error, let him or her know you are sorry. Everyone makes mistakes. Returning gestures or becoming angry will not correct your mistake. It will only serve to make both of you angrier and increase the risk of confrontation or a traffic crash.

Always remember that safe driving is affected by your driving attitude and your ability to control your stress and anger. Do not let

an aggressive driver's behaviors provoke you to the point where you feel compelled to react in kind. If confronted by an aggressive driver, attempt to get out of the way, avoid eye contact and ignore gestures or verbal attacks. If safe to do so, call the police and report the aggressive driver. Also, if an aggressive driver is involved in a crash farther down the road, stop a safe distance from the crash scene, wait for the police to arrive and report the driving behavior witnessed.