

Boston Attorney Offers Best Ideas to Make Roads Safer for Uber, Lyft and Bikes

The rise of ride-share services like Uber and Lyft has made it easier for Boston-area residents to get around, but that convenience comes at a cost. In particular, cyclists have been put at risk by the behavior of some ride-share drivers. With spring just around the corner and the number of bicycles on our roads likely to increase, it's worth looking at how ride-share services can contribute to bicycle accidents.

Last month, a coalition of bicycle, pedestrian and transit advocates in Greater Boston sent an [open letter to Lyft and Uber](#) listing concerns about ride-share drivers and bicyclists. In particular, Uber and Lyft drivers have been pulling over or parking in designated bicycle lanes as they pick up and drop off passengers.

Why that's dangerous

There's a reason Boston and surrounding municipalities have invested so much money in bicycle lanes and similar infrastructure projects: keeping cyclists separate from cars keeps them safe. When bicycle lanes are obstructed, cyclists are forced into the main roadway alongside cars and trucks, which puts them at serious risk of being injured.

In areas with bicycle lanes, motorists may not be used to sharing the road with cyclists, which means they aren't paying attention. That's particularly dangerous at the change of seasons when more people are getting back on their bikes after putting them away during the winter. Cyclists are especially vulnerable to being hit by distracted drivers – someone whose attention is divided may still notice a car, but not a much smaller and much quieter bicycle.

Obstructing bicycle lanes also increases the risk of "dooring" collisions. These are incidents when someone opens a car door in front of a bicycle, leaving the cyclist with little time to react. In these situations, the cyclist may either hit the door or swerve into traffic and potentially be hit by the car. Either way, serious and even fatal injuries are common.

Laws in Massachusetts pertaining to bicycle lanes

In Massachusetts, bicycle lanes are legally for cyclists, not motorists. Specifically, [MGL c.89, s.4D](#) states that "The operator of a motor vehicle shall not stand or park the vehicle upon an on-street path or lane designated by an official sign or marking for the exclusive use of bicycles, except in a case of emergency." In other words, motorists, including ride-share drivers, who pull over or park in a bicycle lane, can be ticketed for doing so.

In addition, [MGL c. 90, s.14](#) addresses the matter of dooring incidents, stating, "no person shall open a door on a motor vehicle unless it is reasonably safe to do so without interfering with the movement of other traffic, including bicyclists and pedestrians." The same section also addresses safe passing and right-of-way considerations intended to protect cyclists.

What can be done to protect cyclists?

As the [Daily Free Press](#) reported, one proposed solution is for local governments to establish designated pick-up and drop-off zones for ride-share users so that Uber and Lyft drivers are not tempted to pull over in the bicycle lane. Such zones already exist in Somerville and a few other places, but more are likely needed. Of course, city planners need to be cognizant of the risk that such zones might also increase traffic congestion, which carries its own set of safety concerns.

The bicycle advocates also suggested changes to the Uber and Lyft apps themselves to prioritize bicycle safety. At the end of a ride, Uber and Lyft users have the opportunity to provide feedback on the driver. The companies could easily add a bike safety-related option to the feedback options, such as “stopped/pulled over in a bike lane.”

Ultimately, better education is needed for drivers and passengers to respect bicycle safety, whether they are using ride-share services or not. One technique to avoid dooring accidents is the so-called “Dutch Reach;” that is, reaching across the body with the far hand from the door (your right hand if you’re on the driver’s side of the vehicle, your left hand if you’re on the passenger side). Reaching across the body forces you to turn to the side and makes it easy to check over your shoulder for bicycles or motorcycles. It also curbs wide, sudden opening, giving bikers and pedestrians more time to react.

If you’ve been injured in a bicycle accident in Boston, we can help

Bicycle accidents can easily give way to complex legal cases, in part because the injuries involved are often severe. Massachusetts’ laws regarding liability for bicycle crashes are complex. When a ride-share service is involved, there is another layer of complexity – either the driver’s personal insurance or the ride-share company’s insurance may be responsible for paying, depending on the circumstances.

If you’ve been injured, you need a proved advocate on your side, fighting for your rights. Give your case the Salomone Advantage. Contact us to schedule your free consultation with a bicycle accident attorney.