

# Defining a Three Feet Minimum Safe Passing Distance in Georgia

Georgia Bikes Alliance, the statewide advocacy organization, enthusiastically endorses HB-988.

## **Problem Definition**

Bicyclists traveling on Georgia’s roadways face risks associated with motorists passing too closely, even when riding as far to the right as practicable (in accordance with state and local laws). Known as being “buzzed,” this occurrence poses an unnecessary risk to cyclists and is a factor in too many crashes.

## **Benefits of Defining the Minimum Safe Passing Distance**

- ➔ Prevent crashes, injuries, and deaths
- ➔ Educate with a clear message: give 3 feet when passing
- ➔ Facilitate enforcement by providing a measurable guideline

1) **Prevent Crashes** – According to a University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center study of a six state sample, overtaking motorists accounted for 9% of crashes, and 20% of those crashes resulted in serious injury or death, indicating a very dangerous crash type.

The numbers are even more dramatic in Georgia for 2004-2006:

- 2,819 bicycle crashes reported and 62 cyclists killed
- 1,049 crashes involved a car and a bicycle both traveling straight (37% of all crashes)
- In 34 of these crashes a cyclist was killed (55% of the 62 total fatalities for the period)

Over half (55%) of cyclists killed on Georgia’s roadways over the three-year period were involved in crashes in which the motor vehicle and bicycle were both traveling straight ahead. Requiring drivers to give at least three feet when passing, if adequately promoted and enforced, would greatly lessen the risk of cyclists being hit by passing cars in Georgia.

	2004	2005	2006
<i>Cyclists killed annually in Georgia, 2004-2006</i>	20	23	19

## **2) Education**

This law would help organizations charged with improving the safety of Georgia’s roadways to better educate the public on the minimum safe distance for passing bicyclists. Currently, many motorists including professionals such as taxi and bus drivers believe simply avoiding contact with a bicyclist is all that is required. They are often unaware of the danger of passing a cyclist too closely, which even in instances in which the cyclist is not hit can lead to a crash from the cyclist’s reflexive action.

## **3) Enforcement:**

Defining the minimum safe passing distance as three feet would give law enforcement a measurable tool for improving safety. Officers in Woodstock, Georgia conducted an undercover operation in 2008 to demonstrate the safe passing distance to drivers, and simply carried a yardstick to give drivers not giving sufficient passing distance a better sense of the measurement.

## **Other states:**

Law in 16: AZ, AR, CO, CT, FL, IL, LA, KY, ME, MN, NH, NM, OK, TN, UT, WI

Bills introduced in 7: GA, MD, MO, OH, SD, VA, WA

## **Sources:**

*National Center for Statistics and Analysis, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), Georgia DOT Traffic Records, and the University of North Carolina Highway Safety Research Center*

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