

## Improving Road Cycling Safety

By: Emerald Tse

In 1967, Davis, California became the first city in the United States to create official bike lanes<sup>1</sup>. Now with more than 100 miles of designated bike lanes and paths, it is common to see residents cycling around town. This is especially so during the academic year, as thousands of students at the University of California, Davis rush to their classes on wheels. I have been a resident of Davis for several years, so I am no stranger to the cycling rules of the road. However, I still remember that before moving to this city, I was worried about cycling on the road safely.

I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles, where cars dominate the road. Between 2016 and 2018, the number of cyclist deaths on California roads averaged over 100 each year<sup>2</sup>, so the thought of cycling alongside cars moving more than two or three times my speed was terrifying. When I decided to move to Davis, I knew that I had to move past this fear. Coincidentally, I found a local organization that was hosting a “Need to Know Bike Safety” class, so I registered. The first thing I learned was that cyclists are subject to the same rules and regulations as drivers. After explaining the traffic laws meant to keep us safe, the instructors led a ride around the city, allowing me to practice changing lanes and using my hand signals. Although the class was just two hours, it was enough to make me feel more confident navigating city streets on a bike. Programs like this are one of the few steps cities can take to make their roads safer.

Even so, I understand that my experience is not a common one. Many cities across the United States do not have designated bike lanes and paths<sup>3</sup>, let alone classes on bike safety. Nevertheless, policy advocacy and community engagement regarding bike safety are simple changes that promote overall community safety. Policy can incentivize the installation of designated bike lanes, bike-specific traffic signals, and bike parking spaces to protect and support those on bikes as well as those on motor vehicles<sup>4</sup>. Policy can also educate the public about sharing the road and hold us accountable for keeping our roads safe. We can contact local officials about creating and maintaining the infrastructure necessary to achieve these goals.

While policy can effectuate change, improving road cycling safety is ultimately a matter of individual responsibility. I can lead by example, riding with a helmet and, at night, with bike lights. Even in bike-friendly cities such as Davis, I can encourage my friends not to ride while

wearing headphones or talking on the phone. I can also report hazards such as potholes to the city so that they do not endanger others on the road. These small steps can cause a ripple effect and create safer streets for not only cyclists but for everyone on the road.

## Works Cited

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