

Risk Insight: Sharing the Road with Vulnerable Road Users



The number of cyclists, users of scooter/e-scooters, etc using the road is increasing, which is leading to a higher number being involved in collisions. Given the inherent vulnerability of these road users, it is important to look at how to minimise the risk of being involved in a collision with a cyclist, especially for those organisations operating larger vehicles.

The Scale of the Problem

Pedestrian fatalities increased from 456 in 2018 to 462 in 2019. Since 2010 the number of fatalities remained broadly constant and year-on-year changes are likely to be due to natural variation. Overall, pedestrian casualties decreased by 3% between 2018 and 2019 to 21,836. Pedestrians represented 14% of all casualties in 2019.¹

Although the number of pedal cyclists killed on the roads in 2019 was slightly lower than in 2018, the 98 fatalities is very similar to the level seen since 2008. Overall, cyclist casualties also decreased by 4% between 2018 and 2019, to 16,873. Cyclists represented 11% of all casualties in 2019.¹

Motorcyclist fatalities decreased in 2019 compared with 2018. In total, 335 motorcyclists were killed during 2019, down from 354 in 2018. However, motorcyclist fatalities have fluctuated between 319 and 365 over 2011 to 2019 with no clear trend. Overall motorcyclist casualties decreased by 4% between 2018 and 2019 to 16,196 casualties.¹

In relation to horse riders the available statistics for 2018 show that there were:

- 3 fatalities
- 25 Seriously injured and
- 49 slightly injured 49 for 2018

From Nov 2010 – March 2019, there have been 3,737 incidents reported to the British Horse Society². Those incidents include 43 human fatalities and 315 horses killed.

To summarise the scale of the problem, in 2019 vulnerable road users made up 51% of the fatalities report by Police Authorities across UK to the Department of Transport.

Whilst there are many issues to address around infrastructure as well as the behaviour of some cyclists/riders themselves, these are not short-term solutions. This Risk Insight sets out to give you some ideas about what you can do to help prevent this type of collision occurring.

What are the Risks?

Risks include pulling out of junctions, overtaking manoeuvres and reversing manoeuvres. But the main risk is associated with larger vehicles turning left, often where a cyclist/rider is not seen by the driver before executing the manoeuvre, either because they have failed to spot the cyclist or the cyclist is in a blind spot on the nearside of the vehicle. This situation could arise because the driver has overtaken the cyclist just before turning left, the driver is in slow moving traffic and the cyclist is attempting to pass on the nearside, or the driver is waiting in stationary traffic (especially at traffic lights) and the cyclist has pulled up next to the vehicle.

Whilst turning left is the main risk associated with sharing the road with cyclists/riders, as noted earlier there are other risks too, and it is important to understand all the issues associated with sharing the road with these vulnerable road users:

- Larger vehicles overtaking cyclists/riders and either not allowing them enough room or pulling in too soon.
- Cyclists/riders (including e-scooters) will often have to avoid obstacles such as drains or a damaged road surface when riding along the road, so may either suddenly move out from their kerbside position, or they may choose a path closer to the centre of the carriageway to avoid the need to swerve to avoid kerbside obstructions – this is especially true at night when it is more difficult for the rider to see any obstructions.
- When cycling uphill, riders are more likely to wobble as their speed decreases, so should be given more clearance.
- In windy conditions, cyclists can be blown off course when passed by larger vehicles, or from gusts of wind when passing gaps in roadside buildings, trees and hedges.
- When passing stationary vehicles, cyclists/riders will often give them a wide berth to avoid the risk of colliding with wing mirrors, or an opening door, so may be further towards the centre of the carriageway than expected.
- In slow moving traffic, cyclists may choose to weave in and out of traffic, including passing on the nearside.
- At roundabouts, cyclists might navigate around the island differently to other vehicles, so their road position may not be a good indicator of which exit they intend to take, and from a stationary start it takes them longer to accelerate on to the roundabout, so they require extra space.
- Whilst most cyclists have very good front and rear lights (although it is increasingly common to see these supplemented or replaced with lights mounted on the rider's body or helmet), some do not, so may be difficult to spot in the dark, particularly if they are wearing dark clothing. Other vulnerable road users may not wear visible clothing or lights (e.g. e-scooters).
- In urban areas some cyclists choose to ride through red traffic lights. Also, some vulnerable road users may ignore traffic signs and signals, or cross barriers intended for their protection.
- Many riders signal their intentions but some do not (or do so very late).
- When road conditions are slippery (e.g. in cold weather or when there are wet leaves on the road), the chances of a rider falling from their bicycle is increased, hence their need for extra room.
- Passing horses on a highway too closely or too quickly.
- Changes to road configurations as a result of the pandemic.

So what can Organisations do to minimise the risk?

It is important to have a robust work-related road risk management programme in place – an example of which is indicated in the pictogram, although it is beyond the scope of this Risk Insight to explore this.



At a management/organisational level, the main issues to look at (assuming that the journey was necessary in the first place) are:

- Have we risk assessed our journeys/routes to take into consideration known cyclist collision 'black spots' and high-risk times of day (especially during the rush hour)? Would it be possible to re-route/re-schedule any of these journeys?
- Have we risk assessed our journeys/routes to take into consideration routes that pass by schools? Would it be possible to re-route/re-schedule any of these journeys?
- Have we minimised any time pressures on the driver, so that they are able to drive safely to achieve their objectives? An example of an issue in this area would be unrealistic delivery schedules, meaning that the driver would have to take unacceptable risks to achieve their targets.
- The overall well-being of employees is an important element in any effective work-related road risk management programme. A tired driver is less likely to spot hazards, so a robust fatigue management policy should be in place and audited to check it is being followed, that ensures drivers are not driving when tired. Drivers should take a 15-minute break every two hours, or sooner if they start to feel tired (regardless of any legal requirements), and the overall length of the working day plus any commuting should not induce fatigue. Similarly, a robust drug and alcohol policy (including medicines – prescription and over the counter) should be in place and audited.
- Do the operational needs of the business conflict with safe driving requirements? The best safe driving policies in the world will not be effective if operational requirements mean that they cannot be followed by the driver – it is often more effective to make a small change in operational practices that will allow employees to drive safely. If operational needs are dictated by your customers, engage with them and explain the risks that arise out of their Service Level Agreements.
- Have we raised the issue of the vulnerability of other road users, such as cyclists, pedestrians (especially children) and horses/horse riders? If drivers are aware of some of the specific issues associated with other road users then they can modify their driving accordingly. Get the drivers to think about how they would feel if they were one of these vulnerable road users sharing the road with one of your vehicles!

Drivers

- Is the driver fully concentrating at all times, and not distracted in any way? Examples of distractions would be the use of hands-free telephones, satellite navigation systems, etc. A robust policy on driver distractions (especially the use of telephones) should be in place, with an audit trail to demonstrate compliance. It is also important that drivers retain full concentration in slow moving and stationary traffic, especially if planning to turn left, as these are the times when cyclists/riders are likely to pull up alongside the vehicle.

- Is the driver observing the traffic conditions all around the vehicle, so that they can anticipate the likely actions of other road users and, in this case, especially cyclists?
- Is the driver suffering from fatigue? It is important that drivers are well rested before they start driving and that they are empowered to take breaks when appropriate.
- Has the driver had their eyesight tested in the last two years and, if required, are they wearing their prescribed glasses or contact lenses?
- Are drivers aware of the risks? If a driver is looking for something specific, like a cyclist on the nearside of the vehicle, then they are more likely to spot it, so raising awareness about the issue will help ensure that drivers are always on the lookout for riders.
- Are the drivers always giving clear signals in plenty of time, especially when turning left? It is important to give other road users, and in this case especially cyclists, plenty of warning of impending direction changes. This is true even in slow moving or stationary traffic, as a left-hand indicator may prevent a cyclist from choosing to pull up alongside the vehicle or 'undertake'. It is also worth reminding drivers that just because they are signalling, this does not give them an automatic right of way – they must first check that it is safe (and legal) to carry out the manoeuvre.

Vehicles

- Is the vehicle well maintained, especially with respect to working lights? If the left-hand indicator is not working, then a cyclist/rider would not necessarily know that the vehicle is about to make a left turn. Make sure that the vehicle's windows and mirrors are kept clean and ice free, as this will help the driver spot potential hazards easier.
- Are there signs on your (larger) vehicles warning cyclists of the risks of pulling up on the nearside of the vehicle?
- Have you provided additional mirrors for your (larger) vehicles which can reduce (but not eliminate) the blind spot on the nearside of the vehicle?
- Where applicable, are your large goods vehicles meeting the requirements of the TfL Direct Vision Standard?
- Consider fitting blind spot proximity sensors that can alert the driver if there is a cyclist (or pedestrian) in their blind spot.
- Consider fitting turn alert systems, which give a verbal "Warning, vehicle turning left" audible warning, similar to the reversing alerts fitted on some vehicles (and can be combined with the blind spot proximity sensor).

Any enhanced vehicle features, as highlighted above, must be accompanied by the appropriate training for the drivers – they must know how to use them effectively and also their limitations (e.g. an audible warning might not be heard by a cyclist who is wearing headphones), and to not rely on them as a way to mitigate the risk.

Many of the issues addressed above will, of course, make employees safer drivers in all road situations – driving is a high risk activity, which is often overlooked, and for most employees, their chance of getting injured or, more importantly in this case, injuring someone else is greater whilst driving than during any other work activity.

A safe driver will try and avoid collisions regardless of who is at fault – many cyclists ride very safely, but for those that choose not to, following the advice given above will help minimise the chance that one of your drivers will be involved in a collision with a cyclist.

References:

1. Reported Road Casualties Great Britain: 2019, Department for Transport
2. British Horse Society - Dead Slow Campaign



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