

# Riding on Paved Paths



Photos: Krysia Haag

**Paved paths are increasingly popular in many parts of Georgia. Some, like the PATH system in metro Atlanta, are bikeable networks that provide alternate routes to destinations and provide good connectivity. The Silver Comet Trail, west of metro Atlanta, now links up with Alabama's Chief Ladiga Trail, linking Smyrna, Georgia with Anniston, Alabama, a distance of over 100 miles.**

Paved paths usually fall into two categories – rail-to-trail conversions, or paved paths that run along roadways or through parks and greenspace. The latter are referred to by interchangeable names such as multi-use trails, shared-use paths, sidepaths, greenways, or some

variation thereof. Rail-trails, built on former railroad beds, feature reasonably flat terrain and access that is limited to trailheads, other trails, intersecting roadways, and sometimes parks.

Typical paved paths sometimes look like a wide sidewalk, but are built to accommodate pedestrians, cyclists, and other non-motorized users. An extended trail like this may run along a roadside, then veer into a park or open space before connecting to another road. These are sometimes combined with on-road bicycle facilities to form a network of “bike routes” that connect various destinations.

**Safety issues.** Many people assume that cyclists are automatically safer on paved paths than sharing

the road with automobile traffic, but this is not necessarily the case. While they provide a degree of separation between automobiles and bicycles, paths present other potential hazards. Cyclists will frequently find themselves sharing these facilities with other cyclists, pedestrians, joggers, small children, and pets. Any type of collision involving a cyclist with other users poses a serious risk of injury to all.

Often, both pedestrians and cyclists have little experience or training sharing space with one another, so misunderstandings on what constitutes proper “trail etiquette” can happen. To be safe, ride slower around pedestrians, and always assume that they have the right of way.

**Sidepaths.** Cyclists using side paths along roads have an added element to deal with – automobile traffic. When using these paths, cyclists need to be aware of possible automobile traffic crossing the path at curb cuts and driveways. Cyclists will also need to use extra caution to safely merge back on to the road in areas where the path comes to an end.

Some sidepaths are built only on one side of a road, but accommodate bicycle traffic going in both directions. Cyclists riding against traffic on these paths can find themselves in awkward positions at intersections where they are not riding with the flow of traffic. When this occurs, it can be safer to dismount and cross the intersection as a pedestrian.

## Paved Path Etiquette

- Yield to pedestrians. Pedestrians always have the right-of-way.
- The path is like a roadway. Keep to the right and pass on the left.
- Announce yourself. Warn other path users as you approach from behind. For example, say “On your left” when approaching.
- If you stop, pull off of the path. Always allow other users to pass on the left.
- Watch out for maintenance and security needs while on the trail. Report crime and maintenance problems to authorities.
- Obey all signs and rules. Stop at intersections. Travel at safe speeds. Keep right.
- Keep the trail clean. Don't litter.

## Paved path basics for cyclists

As a cyclist, the same general principles of road riding apply on trails. Stay to the right, and pass others on the left. Be mindful of other users, and adjust your speed accordingly so you don't pose a hazard to them. Assume that pedestrians have the right of way. Use extra caution at intersections, trailheads, or anywhere there is



Photo: Krysia Haag

*Paved paths that run along only one side of the road can leave cyclists in an awkward position at intersections where they are not in the flow of traffic.*



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Use extra caution near intersections, driveways, and curb cuts where automobiles can cross a path.

access for anyone to enter or exit the path. Provide some audible or verbal warning if you're approaching from behind, but do so in a way that does not scare or startle them (they may just move into your travel path).

While paths directly along roadways provide an added degree of separation from automobile traffic, it is important to be aware of traffic on the road. If the path itself crosses driveways or intersec-

tions, drivers may be looking to turn into an area that crosses the path. Since the cyclist is not actually in the road, drivers' awareness of them as part of the traffic pattern may not register. The same rules of road riding still apply: use hand signals to indicate turns and stops. Wear bright colored clothing so as to make yourself more visible.

#### Sharing paths with other users

**Approaching pedestrians from behind.** Do not assume pedestrians are aware you're coming up behind them. They almost certainly do not see you and they may not hear you. Try to provide some audible warning as you approach, and do so before you get too close so you do not startle them. If you have a bell or horn, sounding it from a reasonable distance is helpful. If not, say "Passing on your left" as you get closer, but do not wait until you are right on top of them. If



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Ride to the right on trails, much like on the street.

#### See these links for more details on trails in Georgia and the southeast

<b>Trail Express</b>	<a href="http://www.trailexpress.com">www.trailexpress.com</a>
<b>PATH Foundation</b>	<a href="http://www.pathfoundation.org">www.pathfoundation.org</a>
<b>Georgia State Parks Department</b>	<a href="http://www.gastateparks.org">www.gastateparks.org</a>
<b>Rails to Trails Conservancy</b>	<a href="http://www.railtrails.org">www.railtrails.org</a>
<b>Great Bicycle Trails</b>	<a href="http://www.great-trails.com">www.great-trails.com</a>

they have an idea a cyclist is approaching, they will have time to react and won't be caught off guard. Unless you're already going slow, make a point to slow down and give them some extra space as you pass.

**Approaching head-on.** Since pedestrians usually prefer to travel against traffic, it can create an awkward situation when a cyclist is traveling in the opposite direction on the same path. The cyclist, moving faster, will usually be the one to choose which way to go. Make eye contact and try to get an indication of whether or not they are aware that you're approaching. Slow down as you get closer and give them some space as you pass.

Not all of the pedestrians you encounter will be accustomed to dealing with cyclists. Talking with another person, attending to a child, or listening to headphones also may distract them. It helps if they are aware that you're approaching, but they are likely to be annoyed if yelled at or do not see or hear you until you are too close.

**Pets, children, and skaters.** The term "multi-use," as applied to paths, means just that - paths are open to all users, not just cyclists. Rail-trail facilities such as Silver Comet are popular destinations for families with kids and pets, since they are often park-like places. Kids and dogs can be somewhat unpredictable and can veer into

your travel path, so slow down considerably when approaching, especially from behind.

Non-cyclists can sometimes have trouble estimating how fast a bicycle is approaching. If you see someone at the trail side who's about to enter the trail, slow down and try to make eye contact. Be prepared if they move out into the lane to give them some space if needed.

Inline skaters require more pavement width as they push from side to side. Plan to give them a wide berth as you pass and some verbal indication that you're approaching.

Young children sometimes have a tendency to weave as they ride, rather than riding in a straight line. They also don't have the awareness of other trail users that most adults do. Always slow down and give kids some extra space.

Most paved paths experience much heavier traffic near the trailheads and attractions, especially during nice weather in the spring and fall. Cyclists should give pedestrians the right-of-way and slow down, using extra caution riding in these areas. Speed can be increased where traffic is lighter, depending on location, time of day, and season.