

States give cyclists room to ride

Laws provide 3-foot buffer of protection on the road

By Trevor Hughes
USA TODAY

As more riders take to the roads on bicycles, more states are giving them a bigger chunk of pavement — 3 feet to be precise — so they won't get swiped by cars.

A Colorado law recently signed by Democratic Gov. Bill Ritter not only requires motorists to give riders at least a 3-foot-wide berth, it also makes it illegal to throw things at riders, says Dan Grunig, executive director of Bicycle Colorado. Previously, he says, police could only cite a motorist if they actually hit the rider.

"Cyclists need to be treated with respect and not surprise," Grunig said.

Tim Anderson, 52, of Fort Collins, Colo., says he often is harassed by drivers while riding his bike. "It can't always be that the fastest, heaviest vehicle wins," he says.

The Colorado law is similar to several passed or considered this year in Louisiana, Wisconsin, New Jersey and Texas.

► **Louisiana** passed a 3-feet-to-pass law in June. Motorists who fail to give riders enough room to pass can be fined up to \$50. The law also makes it unlawful to harass, taunt or maliciously throw objects at cyclists.

► **Wisconsin** lawmakers in June eliminated a re-

quirement that bicyclists ride 3 feet away from parked cars. The law also prohibits motorists from opening car doors without checking for cyclists.

► **New Jersey's** General Assembly passed a 3-feet-to-pass bill on June 25. It is now being considered by the Senate transportation committee.

► **Texas** lawmakers passed a 3-feet-to-pass law but Republican Gov. Rick Perry vetoed it in June, noting that drivers already face penalties for reckless or careless driving.

A Washington, D.C., law that took effect March 26, 2008, also requires motorists give riders 3 feet of space when passing.

Joe Mizereck of 3FeetPlease.com says other states with the laws include Arkansas, Maine, Tennessee, Florida, Connecticut, New Hampshire, Oregon, Illinois, Minnesota, Utah, Wisconsin, Arizona and Oklahoma.

The number of bike commuters rose from about 483,145 in 2003 to about 664,859 in 2007, a 37.6% increase, according to the Census Bureau's American Community Survey.

Not everyone supports the new laws. Larimer County, Colo., Sheriff James Alderden, who testified against Colorado's 3-feet-to-pass law, called them "basically impossible" to enforce and said he thinks some bicyclists, "cop an attitude" when it comes to following traffic laws.

Hughes reports for the *Fort Collins* (Colo.) *Coloradoan*. Contributing: Ben Jones, *The Post-Crescent*, Appleton, Wis.; Sherry Shephard, *The* (Shreveport, La.) *Times*; Laura Bruno, *Daily Record*, Morris County, N.J.

Motorists vs. cyclists

■ On collision course, 3A