

Cycling Event Principles & Rules

Safety on the road during Habitat events

Habitat for Humanity cycling events are typically social events and recreational rides – they are not races. We encourage you to ride as part of a group (at least 3 cyclists). Group riding makes the ride safer, more enjoyable, and enables you to ride more efficiently and cover more ground.

If you have not done much (or any) group riding before, take advantage of some of the group practice rides this spring to get familiar and comfortable with the dynamics of riding in a group.

Riding close to other riders is a learned skill, and having some practice will improve your group riding skills. If you have not previously ridden in a Habitat cycling event, you are encouraged to work with a mentor and/or participate in Woodcock Cycle Works group rides before leaving on the trip.

Global Cycling Network (GCN) has made a great video about riding in groups that you can watch here: <https://youtu.be/lhvbGzv0I5w>

Style Groups

For most of our cycling events, we have defined three, self-selected style groups. Each rider can decide for themselves which group to join at the beginning of each riding day and can change groups at rest stops if they want to.

Your style group may all ride together for the whole day, or smaller groups may form based on how fast people want to ride, how many stops people prefer, etc. Whether you are riding in a large group or a small group, take a few minutes to determine how the group wants to manage itself.

The style groups are:

Cappuccino:

A fairly relaxed ride, enjoying the views and appreciating the opportunity to be out on a bike for a multi-day trip with other like-minded cyclists. This group will certainly find the ride to be physically challenging, but riding hard is not their main focus. This group may appeal to newer riders.

Macchiato:

More physically challenging than the first group, but not driving as hard as the third group.

Espresso:

A group of riders who want to challenge their bodies and equipment and ride hard for most of the day. Still enjoying the route, but more focused on riding hard and putting as many kilometers on as possible.

	Smell of flowers	Smell of sweat	The journey is most important	The distance is most important
Cappuccino	1	3	1	3
Macchiato	2	2	2	2
Espresso	3	1	3	1

1 = Most important / 2 = Somewhat important / 3 = Least important

General Principles and Rules

Different groups have different expectations, rules, and customs. What follows are our principles and basic rules. All riders are expected to adhere to them. What matters is not that our rules are perfect (far from and not possible), but that all riders respect and follow them so we achieve consistency and safety within the ride. Risk increases when people do things unexpectedly. Consistency helps keep things safe.

Principle 1 - Ride within your abilities

- The “drop and regroup” format enables everyone the opportunity to self-select out of a situation they do not feel comfortable with. Recognize your own physical and technical limits and stay within them. If you’re uncertain or uncomfortable with a situation, safely take yourself out of it then return to the group at the next re-group point.
- If you do not know what your limits are, first watch and follow; then, when you feel ready, test yourself gradually and in small increments. Recognize that skill and experience take time (often years) to develop.
- Understand that what is scary or impossible for you today will become easy and possible tomorrow, with practice. Rely on your own skill level and experience to determine what’s safe for you; judge based upon your own capabilities, not the capabilities of others.

Principle 2 - Maintain your awareness

- Regardless of your skill, experience, or ability, maintaining a broad field of awareness is the most important safety skill. Understand that you can only ride safely by always looking far ahead. Fear comes from surprise. Surprise comes from the unexpected. When your field of awareness is too small, you invite surprises and increase risk, not just for you but for those nearby.
- Awareness is the foundation skill that all other skills are based upon. Riders are expected to learn awareness skills, including the ability to always ride “eyes up”. Everything else (conversations, tactics, etc.) must come second to riding “eyes up”. Riders must learn to analyze what’s ahead and plan for it, both for themselves and those following.
- When in a group, the most important awareness skill is the ability to “look through” obstacles (other riders, vehicles, etc.) to maintain awareness. This means not simply looking past the rider immediately in front of you. Always try to look past ALL riders in the group and into the space ahead. Only use brief glances to keep tabs on the road and riders nearby.

Principle 3 - Expect the unexpected

- Despite our best efforts, we all make mistakes. Especially when pushed to our physical limits. Dangerous riding contrary to our rules will not be tolerated, yet perfection should not be expected. Adopt the mindset that every other rider is part of the route, themselves obstacles you must navigate, not just the route itself.
- Learn to read the riders around you; develop awareness by doing so constantly. Watch others for signs of fatigue or changes in behaviour; assess if they’ve lost awareness or are starting to struggle due to fatigue. Anticipate and adjust moment to moment. Leave more space than normal if the situation calls for it.
- If you fall off your bike for any reason, let others know – people within your group or support team members. You may have sustained a minor injury that you are unaware of, but which can become more serious with time, or you may have damaged your bike or gear and require adjustments before continuing.

Principle 4 - Safety while riding in a group

Communicate

- When you are riding with a group, if you have an issue (no matter how insignificant), please speak up so it can be addressed. If you are tired or simply can’t hold the pace, let others know. If you are riding at a speed that is not in your comfort zone, feel free to change groups during the ride (dropping back) or at a rest stop if you would like to ride at a faster pace. This should be a challenging but thoroughly enjoyable experience for everyone.

Discuss

- Shared Leadership: Leading (or pulling) a group takes more energy than being further back in the pack (this is why riding in a group increases your efficiency). Typically, leaders will change every few seconds or minutes. Decide what this interval is and how to manage changes.
- Target cadence or speed: Different circumstances (wind, hills, traffic) will change how fast a group can move, but the group should agree on what your general targets are.
- Target distance: How long is this group going to ride together? If there are optional stops on the route, is the group going to stop or carry on?
- Gap communication: How are you going to communicate that someone is dropping back from the group? It is important to let the group leader know if a gap is forming between riders so that they can adjust their pace and let others catch up.

Consistency

- One of the most important things about riding in a group is being consistent. Consistent cadence, signaling moves and speed changes, and making changes deliberately and predictably will help those around you to know what you are doing and allow for a group to ride safely and efficiently.

Hand signals

- While riding in a group, you are responsible for the cyclists behind you, and it is imperative that you point out hazards ahead of you. The best way to do this is through hand signals rather than calling them out. If you see a rider ahead of you displaying a particular hand signal, please share the same with the riders behind you so everyone is aware of upcoming hazards. Here is a great video from the folks at GCN with an overview: <https://youtu.be/prYMM7D2qF8>
- Here is a quick video that Miles and Brett made (during the pandemic) to highlight a few other hand signals you may see on the ride: <https://youtu.be/eX11u8Xz5c4>

Flat tires

- If you do get a flat while riding in a group, it is very important to control your bike, notify the riders around you verbally “FLAT!” to clearly identify your issue and then slowly reduce your speed and move out of the peloton. Do not swerve or stop abruptly. If you can repair the tire on your own, please feel free to do so and join the next group as they approach (if your group left). If the tire is not repairable, or there is a significant mechanical failure please wait for a support vehicle to assist – either way, you will not be stranded at the side of the road.

When leading

- Those leading are responsible for ALL riders behind. Pointing out obstacles far in advance is expected but not sufficient. Leaders are expected to anticipate and guide all followers wide, and early around obstacles and hazards. Use hand-signals early and make direction adjustments in a slow and deliberate manner, giving those following – specifically those at the very back - lots of time to recognize, adjust, and follow safely.

When following

- Those following are responsible for themselves and for maintaining awareness of what is happening ahead. Riders should never follow blindly or trustingly. Always give riders in front enough space to move about unexpectedly (wheel-width at minimum). Some obstacles cannot be seen or anticipated. Do not rely on those in front of you to be perfect 100% of the time.

No sudden moves

- “Sudden moves” within a cycling team can pose significant risks to the safety of all riders involved. Unlike in competitive racing where attacks are a strategic tactic, group rides prioritize cooperative and safe cycling behavior.
- When riding in a group and aiming to change your position within the peloton, safety should always be the top priority. Before making any moves, ensure that the road ahead and behind is clear of obstacles and other riders. Communication is key; signal your intention to change position by using clear hand signals or verbal cues.
- When passing other riders, always pass on the left side and provide a verbal warning before overtaking. This helps to prevent surprises and reduces the risk of collisions. Additionally, make any adjustments to your position gradually and early, allowing other riders to anticipate your movements.
- It’s important to recognize that the need for sudden moves, whether initiated by you or other riders, often stems from a lack of awareness or communication within the group. Foster a culture of open communication among riders, encouraging discussions about safe riding practices and mutual respect on the road.

Shouting out obstacles

- Shout-outs are to be avoided. Shouting increases risk because most in the group will not be able to hear or understand what was said due to wind and traffic noise, creating confusion and panic. Recognize that shout-outs are a symptom of awareness problems and poor etiquette by those leading. Instead of shouting, lead safely. Use hand signals, adjust slowly, early, and ride around obstacles.
- If you find yourself riding into an obstacle (debris or a pothole) DO NOT attempt to hand signal. Keep both hands on the bars and ride through the obstacle, keeping a firm grip on the bar with knees and elbows bent to absorb shock, to the best of your ability.

Principle 5 - Situational awareness

Look past the rider in front of you

- Whether you are riding in a small group or a large peloton, it is important to look as far ahead as possible. It is quite easy to find yourself staring at the wheel, rear cassette or light on the back of the bike in front of you. But doing so will impact your reaction time if there is a hazard to be avoided. Ride heads up.

Stay close to the shoulder

- Parts of these rides take place on highly trafficked roadways. Please be aware of the vehicles approaching from both directions and stay close to or on the shoulder if it is safe to do so. If you intend to pass a rider ahead of you, please check for traffic, signal your intention, notify the cyclist you are passing verbally “ON YOUR LEFT” and only venture into the lane as far as you need to. Do not cross the yellow line in the middle of the highway under any circumstances. Please also be aware that some of the highways have rumble-strips on the shoulders that can negatively impact your cycling experience.

Avoid wheel overlap

- A wheel overlap occurs when the distance closes between two riders in a group and the front wheel of the rear cyclist slightly passes the back wheel of the front cyclist. The danger in this situation is when the front cyclist moves suddenly - they can easily wipe out the rider behind them. If you find yourself closing in on the rider in front of you, gently apply the brakes, notify those around you verbally “SLOWING” or safely move away from their back wheel. Here is an example of how quickly it can happen, but in this case, it was an incredible save: <https://youtu.be/CHlitpYb8I>

Do not surge or brake unexpectedly

- Quick accelerating or braking in a group can cause an accordion effect in the peloton and make the ride much harder and/or more dangerous than it needs to be. Be consistent and predictable and maintain your speed / cadence without causing undue stress to those around you.
- Try to be as consistent as possible in your cadence. Even a slight increase or decrease in pedaling cadence will cause acceleration or deceleration that can cause an accordion effect in the group. If you can't maintain a steady pedaling rhythm, gear down or up until you are in the right gear to maintain a steady rhythm on the road you are travelling.

Downhills

- It doesn't matter if you are an experienced cyclist or if you are new to road riding, downhills can be exhilarating and intimidating. As your speed increases, so should the gap between you and the cyclist in front of you. Please leave yourself lots of room to maneuver if a situation presents (debris on the road, wildlife encounter, flat tire, etc.). A downhill is not the time to be drafting the rider in front of you.

Standing while riding

- It is a good idea to get out of the saddle from time to time while riding long distances. However, when you get out of the saddle, your bike will generally move backwards as you get up, so please let those around you know if you will be standing. This can be done verbally “STANDING” or by showing a thumbs up hand signal with an upwards motion. Either way, please communicate your intentions before making the transition.

Eating / drinking while riding

- This is essential on long rides but can be hazardous in a group setting if you are riding one-handed as you get your water bottle or snack. To avoid any incidents during the rides, consider eating or drinking ONLY when you are at the back of the peloton. If you are riding in front of other riders in the group, signal that you are reaching for your bottle or food.

Not feeling it

It doesn't matter which group you have been riding with, there may come a time when you are not feeling like being on a bike anymore. You may be tired, or sore, or have some problems with your bike or your gear. Good news! You don't have to ride every kilometer.

On most days we will have options for you to ride the bus to the first or second rest stop and start your day there, thus reducing the distance you need to ride that day. Whether you choose to take this option or not, you can always choose to rack your bike and ride the bus or one of the support vehicles.

Our goal is to make sure everyone reaches the end of the trip, not that everyone racks up the most kilometers possible.

