

Bicycle Collision

By Sandra Loreda

Bicyclists share the roads with drivers, yet drivers do not often acknowledge this union. California bicycle related accidents continue to pile up. No matter the attempts to make the road safe for all pedestrians, injury is prone to occur. Earlier this month the Los Angeles Times commemorated the tragic passing of a forty year old male bicyclist, who was involved in a fatal collision with a transit bus. The identity of the parties involved are yet to be revealed. This unfortunate accident occurred on a carpool lane located on the 10 Freeway in Alhambra, CA. While it is uncertain why the bicyclist was on the freeway, this story is not unique, as involvement in accidents is constantly risked when mounting a bicycle.

Although bicycling is not the most popular mean of transportation, bicyclists are still more prone to accidents than motorists. This alarming reality is do to the lack of protection provided by the bicycle itself. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2013, 900 bicyclists were killed and an estimated 494,000 were sent to the emergency department for bicycle-related injuries; resulting in lifelong medical costs. Injuries sending bicyclists to the emergency room were either related to falling or to contact with an automobile. Unfortunately, as the Los Angeles Times' article demonstrated, the risk of fatality when involved in a bicyclist-motorist collision is increased. To prevent such undesired contact, the Department of Motor Vehicles recommends motorists to carefully pass a bicyclist with a clearance of at least 3 feet. What this essentially looks like is the careful usage of two lanes while attempting to pass a bicyclist. The accident on Alhambra could have been prevented had the transit bus carefully passed the cyclist when entering the carpool lane.

Of the accidents dealing with collision, head injuries are the most fatal. Utilizing proper head protection can be the difference between fatality and recovery. Statistics from the CDC reveal that in 2010, 26,000 of bicycle-related injuries were traumatic brain injuries. Consequences of such injury can range from short term or long term disabilities.

But who exactly is in danger of bicyclist collision? According to the CDC young children and adolescents have a 52% risk for non-fatal bicycle related injuries. The law requires that minors under the age of 18 wear at least a helmet when on a bicycle. However, it should be noted that wearing a helmet does not

guarantee protection unless it is well fitted and well positioned. The Department of Motor Vehicles defines a well positioned helmet as one that lays on top of the head as opposed to laying on the back of the head.

In comparison to women, men are more likely to be involved in fatal bicycle injuries. To reduce this risk, it is essential that all members of the driving community understand universal hand signals. To signal a left turn, look over your shoulder and extend your left arm out. To signal a right turn, hold you left arm up while your elbow is bent. To signal a slowing or stopping, extend your left arm down. Using these signals as a bicyclist will help the drivers behind predict your next move. Visibility is another opportunity for collision prevention. Wearing bright clothing during the day and night as well as having rear lights can increase visibility. As mentioned previously, the exact reason for the bicyclist being on the freeway is yet to be determined, however having been on the freeway at 4:30 am, the bicyclist could have been spotted by the driver of the bus, had he been wearing bright clothing and used his rear lights.

The unfortunate reality is that this bicyclist riding on the freeway was not bicycle friendly soil. His death should serve as a reminder of the consequences of not following the rules of the rode and the risks faced when riding a bicycle. Bicycle safety is responsibility of all community members. It is the responsibility of the motorist as his/her vehicle is of greater force. It is the responsibility of the bicyclist who without proper protection may be putting his/her life on the line.