Horse and Buggy Driver's Manual



MICHIGAN OFFICE OF HIGHWAY SAFETY PLANNING
OHSP

Mid-Michigan District HEALTH DEPARTMENT
CLINTON • GRATIOT • MONTCALM

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In today's fast-paced world, it is crucial for us, as horse-and-buggy drivers, to prioritize safety and adhere to fundamental safety rules while navigating busy roads. With traffic increasing and vehicles moving faster than ever, we must take proactive measures to ensure our safety as well as that of the motorists we share the road with.

To aid in this mission, we have developed a horse and buggy driver safety manual. Properly operating your horse and buggy on these bustling roads can significantly decrease the likelihood of crashes.

This manual is designed for horse and buggy drivers utilizing public roadways. However, it can also serve as a valuable resource for motor vehicle drivers, particularly visitors and tourists who may not be accustomed to sharing the road with horse-drawn vehicles. We hope you find this information beneficial and that you will help us in making our roadways safer for everyone.

Useful Tips for Driving or Operating a Buggy

- Stay awake and alert while driving.
- Always stay focused on your driving and avoid distractions for any reason.
- Never drive under the influence of any substance.
- Ensure your buggy is equipped with lights, that they are turned on, and you have a fully-charged battery before leaving.
- Keep lights on at night and in low visibility. Using lights during daytime driving may also improve visibility.
- Stay as far right as possible when approached by other vehicles, as visibility decreases after dark and drivers may be impaired.
- Always remember to use hand signals or a light signal when turning, and deactivate your turn signal after making a turn.

Chapter 1: Courtesy and Conduct

As horse and buggy drivers, embrace the principle of treating others well. To ensure road safety for everyone, consider the following actions:

- Pull off the road to allow traffic to pass safely.
- Use designated buggy lanes when available.
- Maintain visibility with lights and reflective tape at all times.
- Choose safe horses for road use.
- Train horses to stop at stop signs.

Many children and adults walk, bike, and ride horses on busy roadways. We should be courteous, respectful, and visible, always willing to let faster traffic pass. While the law grants us rights on the road, we must practice the Golden Rule and view road use as a privilege, not a right. When traffic cannot pass due to hills, curves, or oncoming vehicles, kindly pull off to the side when safe to allow others to pass. If possible, drive on the shoulder or as far right as possible while staying vigilant. Being respectful on the road fosters respect for the community and its values. Courteous behavior can positively impact the world, while inconsideration can lead to negativity.

Be courteous while riding or operating a buggy and keep arms and legs inside unless signaling a turn.

Dangling limbs can worry drivers, as they may fear someone could fall out. Passengers should avoid obstructing the driver's view of the roadway and other traffic.

In the event of a traffic crash:

- Move off the road to avoid blocking traffic.
- Call 911. Witnesses should call for help if driver is unable to.
- Be prepared to provide police with personal details such as name, address, and telephone number.
- Write down the names and addresses of witnesses and others involved.
- If you witness a crash, safely pull off the road and wait for police. Provide your name, address, and a statement of what you saw.

Chapter 2: Traffic Signs, Signals, and Pavement Markings

Some of these signs may not be relevant for horse and buggy drivers, but it’s still important to understand what they mean.

Traffic regulating signs: These signs inform you of what actions are permitted and prohibited. A significant number of these signs are red.



At a STOP sign, come to a complete stop at the stop line and yield to pedestrians and oncoming traffic. Once the intersection is clear, proceed. If visibility is obstructed after stopping, move forward cautiously until you can see.

When approaching a YIELD sign, slow down and give right of way to pedestrians and through traffic. Proceed only when it's safe and won't disrupt traffic flow.





These signs are combined on one-way streets or highway ramps to warn drivers they are heading the wrong way.



If turning right, you don't need to stop, but it's wise to slow down because other drivers may not yield.



At a one-lane bridge or underpass, yield to oncoming traffic.



At a four-way intersection, all vehicles must stop. The first to arrive goes first. If two arrive simultaneously, yield to the driver on your right.



No Trucks



No Bicycles



No Pedestrian



No Parking



No U-Turns



No Left Turns



No Right Turns



This sign means passing another vehicle is not allowed from here.



You cannot pass other vehicles moving in the same direction.



When your light turns red, the traffic coming from the opposite direction receives a longer green light.



You may turn left or right in this lane.



You can only turn right during a green light, not a red light.



The center turn lane is designated solely for left turns and cannot be used for through traffic or passing.



This sign instructs drivers to stay right of a median or divider.



This sign shows the maximum speed limit for vehicles, typically 55 mph unless stated otherwise.



A left turn is allowed on a green light, but yield to oncoming traffic.



Parking is designated for individuals with disabilities. An authorized license plate or permit is required to use these spaces, and unauthorized parking may lead to fines and towing.



You may only turn left in this lane.



You may go straight or turn right in this lane.



This sign at an intersection indicates that the left lane must turn left, while the other lane can turn left or go straight.



You may only turn right in this lane.

Warning Signs: These signs indicate the conditions you may encounter on or near the roadway. These signs are placed in advance of the hazard to give you ample time to respond. While most warning signs are yellow, there are some exceptions: construction signs are orange and school signs are fluorescent yellow-green. Bicycle and pedestrian signs can be either yellow or fluorescent yellow-green.



Four-way intersection ahead.



Right-side road intersection ahead.



T intersection ahead.



Y intersection ahead.



This sign indicates that the road curves to the left with a road entering from the right.



This sign indicates a set of reverse curves ahead with the first curve to the right.



This sign indicates a set of reverse curves ahead with the first curve to the left.



This sign indicates that the road may be slippery when wet. Drive carefully and take turns slowly.



A CHEVRON sign indicates there is a sharp turn in the road in the direction of the arrow.



This sign indicates there is a right curve ahead.



This sign indicates there is a sharp left turn ahead.



This sign indicates that the divided highway is ending.



This sign indicates that a divided highway is beginning. Stay to the right.



An advisory speed sign shows the maximum recommended speed for navigating a curve.



A LANE ENDS sign signals that the right lane is coming to an end, prompting drivers to merge into the adjacent lane.



Two-way traffic ahead.
The separated one-way road is ending.



Traffic from the right will be merging into your lane.



Narrow bridge ahead.



Traffic signal ahead. Slow down.



Stop sign ahead. Start to slow down.



A steep hill or downgrade is ahead. Slow down. Trucks should shift to a lower gear to stay in control.



This sign indicates clearance height. Do not enter if your vehicle is taller than indicated.



Railroad crossing ahead. Slow down. Look and listen for an oncoming train.



A pinch point ahead; give space for bicyclists.



Trucks may roll over if traveling too fast on the curve to the left.



School crossing ahead. Slow down and watch for children crossing. Obey the crossing guard if one is present.



Pedestrian crossing ahead.



Bicycle crossing ahead.



Horse and buggies use the roads in this area. Be alert.



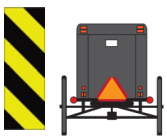
Construction area. A flagger is ahead directing traffic. Slow down.



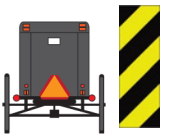
Construction area. Slow down. Stay alert for traffic changes.



Construction area. The right lane of traffic will be closing in 1,000 feet. Merge to the left.



Hazard ahead on the left near the roadway; stay alert. Commonly found at bridge abutments or underpasses.



A hazard is ahead on the right near the roadway. Be alert. typically found at bridge abutments or underpasses.

Guide Signs



US traffic route marker.



To get to US Route 131, go straight and follow the signs.



You are approaching the intersection of US Route 131.



You must turn right to continue on US Route 12 West.



US route marker indicates you are traveling west on US Route 12.



Michigan traffic route marker.

Traffic Signals



- A red light requires you to stop and wait behind the stop bar.
- A yellow light warns that it will soon turn red. Slow down and stop if not at the intersection, but proceed if already crossing.
- A green light allows you to go through the intersection or turn when clear, yielding to crossing pedestrians.



A green arrow signals a permitted left turn, typically during an advanced green phase, allowing your lane to turn while other traffic is stopped (except for oncoming left turns). If the arrow disappears but the green light remains, you can still turn but must yield to oncoming traffic.



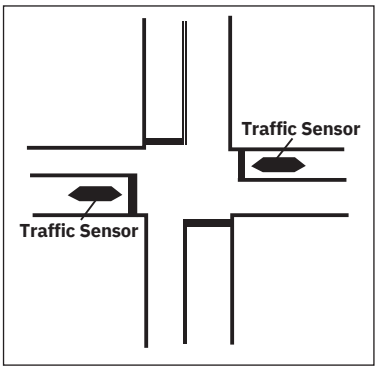
A flashing red light is equivalent to a stop sign; you must stop completely before proceeding.



A flashing yellow light indicates you should slow down and ensure the traffic is clear before moving through the intersection.

If the traffic signal at an intersection is malfunctioning, come to a full stop and only proceed when it is safe, similar to how you would act at a stop sign.

Types of Traffic Signals



Pretimed

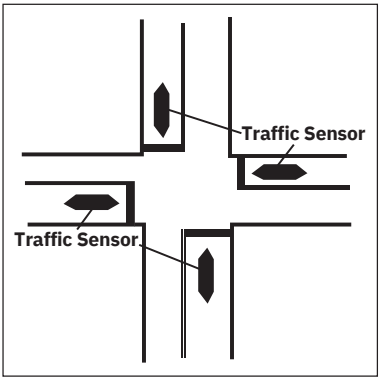
Pre-timed traffic signal control consists of a sequence of phases with fixed durations for green, yellow, and red lights, forming a cycle length that remains constant. This method is typically most effective in areas where traffic patterns can be anticipated based on the time of day.

Semi-Actuated Signals

Semi-actuated traffic signals use detectors on minor streets to adjust green time based on traffic demand. They work best during off-peak hours when minor street traffic is light.

Fully-Actuated Signals

Fully-actuated traffic signal use detectors on all streets allowing green times to adjust and non-actuated phases to be skipped based on demand. It is the most responsive to traffic needs.



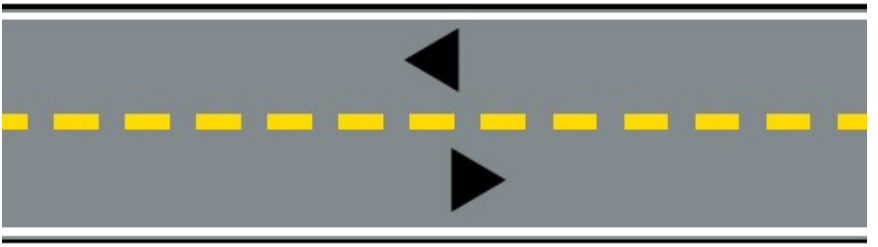
Pedestrian Crossing Signals

There are two varieties of pedestrian crossing signals: those that feature symbols and those that display words. Both types function in the same manner, allowing you to cross the street in the same way.

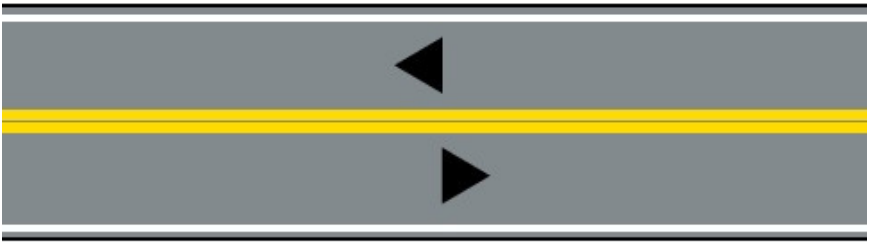


When a steady or flashing WALK signal appears, you may cross the street but watch out for turning vehicles. Although you have the right-of-way, cars may not always yield. A flashing DON'T WALK indicates the signal will soon change; finish crossing if you're in the crosswalk but do not start if you're at the curb. A steady DON'T WALK means do not cross. Audible signals may assist disabled individuals, and drivers must yield to blind pedestrians with canes or guide dogs, allowing them to cross completely.

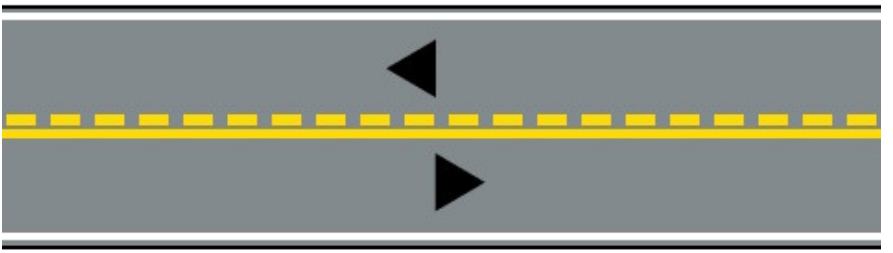
Pavement Markings



This road has two lanes, one for each direction, with a dashed yellow line allowing vehicles to pass.



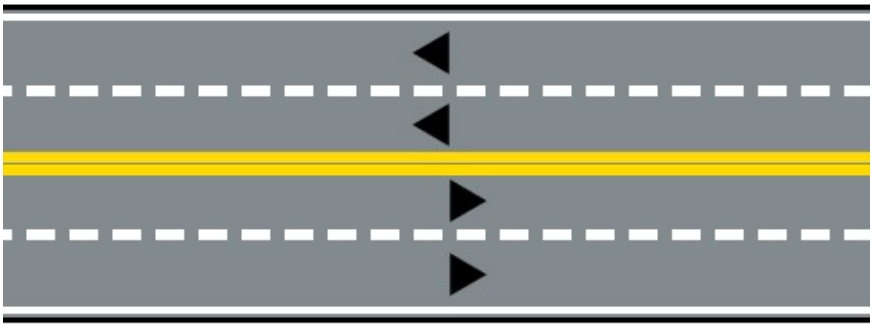
This road has two lanes and a solid double yellow line, indicating no passing is allowed.



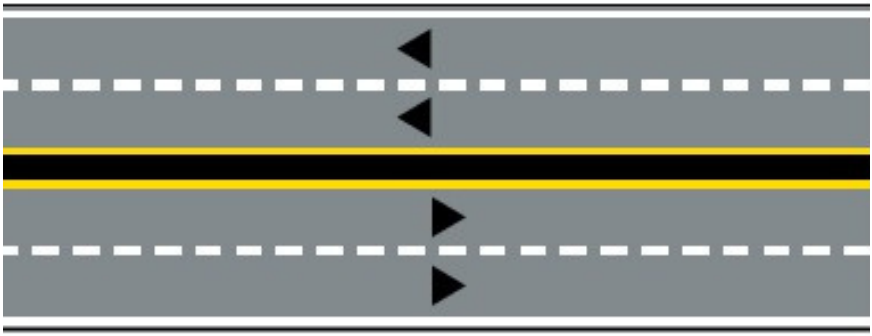
This road has two lanes with a solid yellow line and a dashed yellow line. Vehicles may pass only when on the side with the dashed line, while those on the solid line cannot pass.



This road has two travel lanes and a center turn lane for left turns only; passing in the center lane is not allowed.



This is a two-way, four-lane road with two lanes for traffic in each direction. Dashed white lines permit passing vehicles going the same way, but crossing the solid double yellow line to pass is prohibited.



This highway is a two-way, four-lane access-controlled road with two lanes in each direction, separated by a median made of concrete, grass, or guide rail to prevent crossover into oncoming traffic.

Chapter 3: Horse Handling and Harnesses

When using horses for pulling buggies, it's crucial to treat them well, as they are living beings that can become trusted companions. Unlike cars, horse and buggy drivers must control an animal with a mind of its own. Horses can be easily frightened, so understanding their reactions and experiences is vital for safe handling.

Hitching and unhitching horses should be taught to children with care, ensuring all equipment is properly secured to prevent accidents. A safe hitching sequence is: 1-line, 2-trace, and 3-holdback. The unhitching order is the reverse. This method helps maintain control and safety for both the horse and passengers.

To ensure horse safety and control while driving:

- Horses may spook from buggies due to holdbacks on harnesses; always tie horses with a neck rope.
- Use hitching rails when available; avoid tying to signs or light posts.
- When traveling long distances, don't overwork the horse; allow rest after hills or on hot days for longevity.
- Maintain harnesses to prevent accidents from worn-out parts, such as holdbacks or snaps.
- Regularly check harnesses and replace worn items.
- Keep buggy components like single trees and brakes in excellent condition to prevent malfunctions and ensure safety at stop signs.

Maintenance Checklist

Before traveling, check the following on the harness and buggy:

- Line snaps
- Holdback straps
- Single trees and bolts
- Single tree straps
- Shaft eyes
- Brakes
- Slow-moving vehicle emblem (Fanny flag)
- Battery
- Lights

Chapter 4: Buggy Lighting and Safety Equipment

Buggy lighting emphasizes the importance of proper lighting for slow-moving vehicles on roadways to ensure visibility for safety. With increased criticism from automobile drivers during nighttime, horse and buggy drivers should equip their vehicles with lights and reflectors to enhance visibility, adhering to reasonable standards and church guidelines. This chapter includes recommendations for proper lighting and safety precautions on buggies.

MCL- Section 257. 695 mandates minimum lighting requirements for all vehicles, including animal-drawn ones. Specifically:

- Vehicles made before January 1, 2007, must have:
  - At least one white light visible from 500 feet in front
  - One red light visible from 500 feet in the rear
- Vehicles made on or after January 1, 2007, shall be equipped with a slow-moving vehicle sign, lighting, and reflective markings and must comply with section 684a.

Suggested methods for illuminating the front of a buggy:

- Two white headlights are located at the front of the buggy, no more than 3 inches from the edges. The lights can be tilted slightly downward to avoid blinding oncoming drivers.
- Reflective tape on the front of the buggy is also recommended to improve visibility.



Suggested methods for illuminating the back of a buggy:

- Two red lights located on the rear (one on each side) of the buggy, positioned 3 to 5 feet above the ground.
- One amber (yellow) blinking light centered at the back of the buggy, also 3 to 5 feet from the ground.
- Reflectors and reflective tape are recommended for marking the buggy, with white reflective tape, 2 inches wide, offering the highest visibility (500 feet). Enhancing visibility increases safety for both buggy users and motorists. At night, it can be challenging for other drivers to identify a buggy from the side or rear, making reflectors essential for safety.
- **Note**: Red/silver mix tape is MDOT approved for trucks and trailers, not for buggies.







Slow-Moving Vehicle Emblems



There is likely no better way to alert drivers of a rapidly approaching car than by displaying a slow-moving vehicle (SMV) emblem or a fanny flag on the back of your vehicle. The slow-moving-vehicle emblem is recommended for vehicles traveling under 25 mph. According to MCL 257. 688 (2), it shall be mounted on the rear of the vehicle, broad base down, not less than 3 feet nor more than 5 feet above the ground, and as near the center of the vehicle as possible.

Mirrors

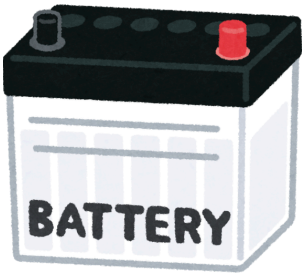
Mirrors can help us to see vehicles approaching from behind us. It should be placed on the driver's side of the buggy so that the driver can see it by moving only his eyes. If the driver sits on the right side of the buggy, an additional mirror can be placed on the left side. For increased safety, a rear view mirror can be added to see the traffic behind you. Make sure the mirror is tilted so that there are no blind spots.

Tips for Caring for Deep-Cycle Batteries

- Ensure the battery is always fully charged. A fully-charged battery won't freeze during winter.
- Do not exceed 14.6 volts when charging your deep-cycle battery.
- Recharge the battery when it falls below 12.00 volts.
- Maintain the water level using only distilled water.
- Keep the connections clean and tidy.
- Batteries can be cleaned using a mixture of water and baking soda.
- Ensure that your battery is securely fastened.

Why Batteries Fail

- Battery charge drops below 10.50 volts
- Heat and overcharge
- Vibration
- Lack of maintenance



Battery State of Charge vs. Voltage/Specific Gravity

Voltage	Specific Gravity	State of Charge	Depth of Charge
12.66	1.265	100%	0%
12.44	1.225	75%	25%
12.25	1.190	50%	50%
12.05	1.145	25%	75%
11.90	1.100	0%	100%

Chapter 5: Driving on the Road

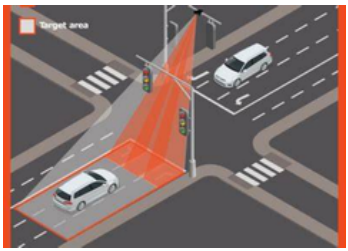
Intersections

Stop-Look-Listen
Intersections can put the horse and buggy at risk. The ability to see cross traffic can be impaired by crops, brush, or buildings. Drivers should listen for vehicle noise before allowing the horse to roll up on or enter into the intersection.

Right-of-Way at Intersections
The concept of right-of-way refers to rules that determine which vehicle is permitted to go first in certain situations. It's vital to have a clear understanding of who holds the right-of-way, as this knowledge can greatly influence safety, differentiating between a safe passage and a potentially dangerous one. Familiarity with right-of-way regulations is key to effective traffic management in busy areas. Additionally, even if a vehicle has the right-of-way, slower vehicles may still need to yield for safety reasons. Buggy drivers should refrain from signaling for other traffic to pass in to avoid liability in the event of an accident. Whenever there is a doubt of who has the right-of-way, do not hesitate to grant the other driver the right-of-way.

Four-way stop: Yield to the vehicle on your right if you arrive simultaneously. If you arrive first, you have the right-of-way. At a two-way stop, traffic on the main road has priority, and you may proceed when clear. If a vehicle is at the opposite stop sign, the first to arrive goes first. Always remain vigilant, as other drivers may not see you or respect your right-of-way; insisting on it can be dangerous.

Traffic signal intersections: Signals determine the right-of-way. Some have road sensors that change the signal to green for the crossroad when triggered by a vehicle's metal. The sensors are diamond-shaped.



To effectively trip traffic light sensors, stay in the middle of the lane since sensors are difficult for horse and buggy to activate. Consider attaching metal to the buggy's bottom to help. If the sensor fails, a passenger can push the pedestrian crossing button, but the driver should not exit, as the horse may move. The button turns the light green for cross traffic and pedestrians. This should be a last resort.

In Michigan, all vehicles, including horse and buggies, are to proceed cautiously at intersections if signals malfunction or fail to detect them and treat them as a four-way stop.

Turning at intersections



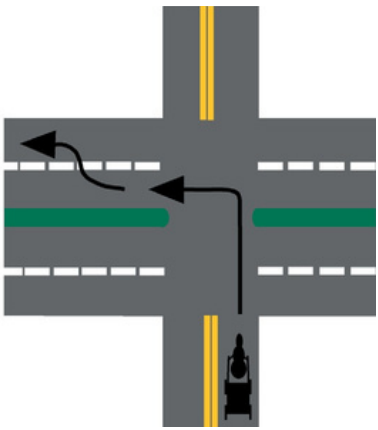
According to Michigan crash statistics, most crashes occur at intersections, often due to speed miscalculations, misuse of turn signals, and hasty driving. It's crucial to slow down when turning to react to unexpected situations, such as vehicles or pedestrians.

Key points:

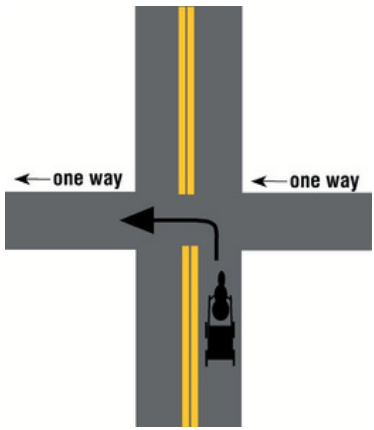
- Never make a left turn from the shoulder.
- Always check mirrors and signals before merging into traffic.
- It's a violation and dangerous to turn left from the right shoulder.
- Ensure the fast lane is clear and yield to traffic when merging.

When making a left turn, enter the fast lane before the intersection to be in the correct lane closest to the center.

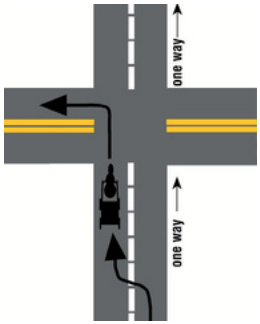
From two-lane to four-lane street.



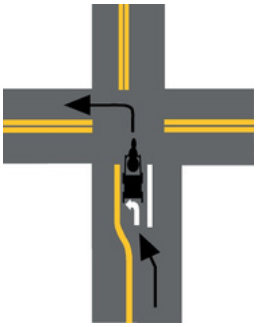
From two-lane to one-way street.



From one-way street to two-lane street.



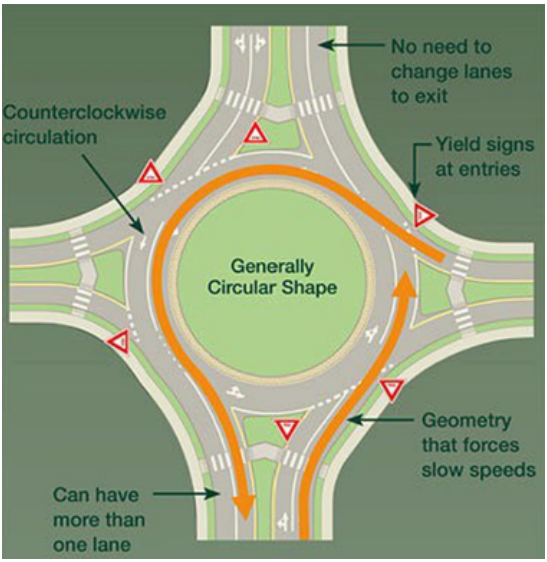
From two-way street with turning lane to two-way street.



From two-lane street to two-lane street.



Using a Roundabout:
A roundabout is a circular intersection where entering traffic yields to vehicles moving counterclockwise around a central island. Vehicles, including bicyclists and pedestrians, must yield to traffic from the left. Exiting is done by making a right turn onto the desired road.



Approaching a Roundabout:
- Check signs and pavement markings for lane guidance.
- Slow down and stay right of the center island.
- Look left at the yield line.
- Enter when there's a gap in traffic; avoid left turns.

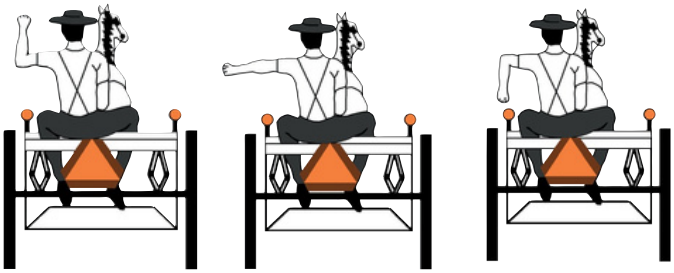
Traveling in a Roundabout:
- Stay right of the center island; vehicles inside have the right of way.
- Do not stop unless necessary to avoid a crash.
- If an emergency vehicle approaches, exit the roundabout and pull over.

Exiting a Roundabout:
- If you miss your exit, go around again.

When driving on narrow country roads, always stay on the right side to ensure safe passage for oncoming vehicles, especially in hilly areas. Many accidents occur due to lack of visibility or communication between drivers. Therefore, use turn signals or hand signals to indicate your intentions before making changes.

- Turning at intersections or driveways
- Pulling away from the curb
- Pulling over to the shoulder
- Changing lanes to pass

The graphic below depicts an open buggy for better visibility of hand signals. While hand signals can be used in closed buggies, turn signals are preferred. Most buggy drivers sit on the right side to observe obstacles on the shoulder.

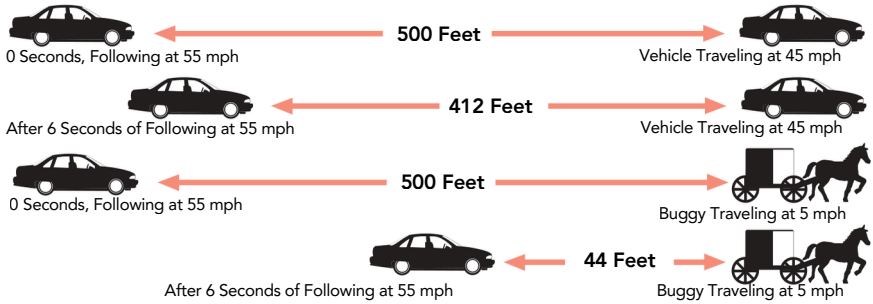


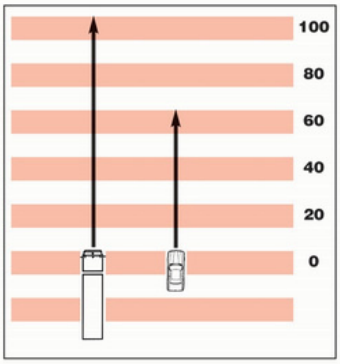
Right Turn **Left Turn** **Slow or Stop**

Maintaining a Safe Distance for Motorized Vehicles and Horse and Buggy:

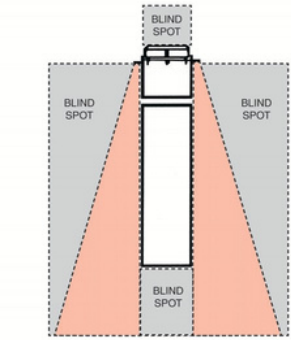
- **Motorized Vehicles** should maintain a safe distance. This is crucial when encountering closely following buggies, especially during church services or funerals. This tight formation can lead to dangerous situations, as sudden stops or passing vehicles may cause accidents. Always keep several hundred feet between your vehicle and the buggy ahead, allowing room for cars to maneuver. If a buggy is closely following you, pull over to let it pass. Exercise caution when passing, especially in areas with limited visibility, as horses may speed up when overtaken.
- **Buggy** racing should be avoided on today's roads. Buggy drivers must also consider the stopping distance required for motor vehicles, ensuring they wait for a safe gap in traffic before merging onto the road. Refer to the next page for additional information.

Following Distance at Varying Speeds





Extra caution is necessary when pulling out in front of trucks and tractor-trailers, as they require a longer stopping distance. A fully loaded tractor-trailer can weigh up to 40 tons and needs at least 100 yards to stop at 55 mph, compared to 60 yards for a 2-ton vehicle. Stopping distance increases with speed, rising nearly 50 percent from 55 mph to 65 mph.



Trucks have blind spots known as the No-Zone, where drivers cannot see surrounding vehicles. To stay safe, avoid these areas when passing, following, or driving alongside a truck. If you can't see the truck driver in their side mirror, they likely can't see you, so reposition yourself to avoid the blind spot.

Emergency Stops

There are two types of emergency stops:

True Emergency Stops

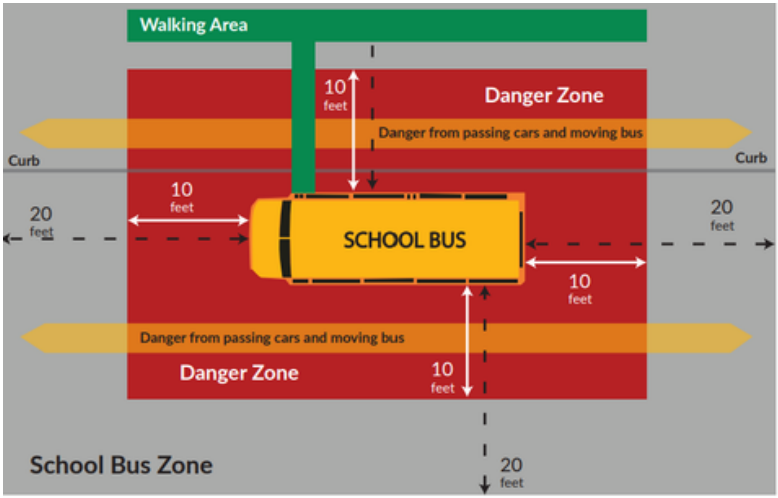
- Stop as far right as possible during sudden emergencies (e.g., a crash).
- Ensure safety before assisting others by monitoring traffic and signaling with tail lights or hand gestures.

Visiting Stops

- When meeting a friend, stop as far right as possible.
- Consider continuing if traffic is heavy or the location is unsafe.

Stopping for School Buses

- Yellow lights indicate the bus will stop; red lights and a stop arm mean you must stop at least 20 feet away.
- Remain stopped until the lights stop flashing and the stop arm retracts, ensuring children are safely off the road.
- No stop is required if in the opposite lane on a separate road or divided highway.



Emergency Vehicles

When encountering emergency vehicles, pull over safely and stay until they pass. Pay attention to your horse and try to control it if it reacts to sirens. Under Michigan law, drivers are required to yield the right of way or pull over when an emergency vehicle is attempting to pass through traffic.

Railroad Crossings

At railroad crossings, obey all signs and signals. Do not cross when signals are flashing. If no signals are present, stop, look both ways, and listen for a train whistle (three blasts before arrival). Do not cross if you hear it; wait for the train to pass. Never stop on tracks, and ensure you are clear of them if traffic is backed up.



Chapter 6: Pedestrians, Bicycles, Scooters, and Other Travel Information

Pedestrians:

- Walk facing oncoming traffic on the left side of the road.
- Wear reflective items for visibility, especially at night. Do not wear dark clothing; you will not be seen, even with headlights. There are many reflective products available to wear that greatly increase your visibility, such as a safety vest, reflective wristbands or armbands, or reflective tape.
- Walk in a single file when with others, and cross roads cautiously.

Bicycles:

- Bicycles are considered vehicles; obey traffic laws.
- Ride on the right side, use hand signals, and pass safely.
- Only sit on the bicycle seat.
- Only have the number of people on a bicycle that it was designed to carry.
- Use reflective gear for increased visibility. Bicycle riders are also strongly encouraged to use reflective material, such as reflectors in the spokes, a safety vest, and reflective ankle straps.

When hiring a driver:

- Respect load and passenger limits.
- Avoid overworking drivers; tired drivers increase crash risks.
- Follow seat belt and car seat laws.

Public Transit Buses:

- An alternative transportation option.

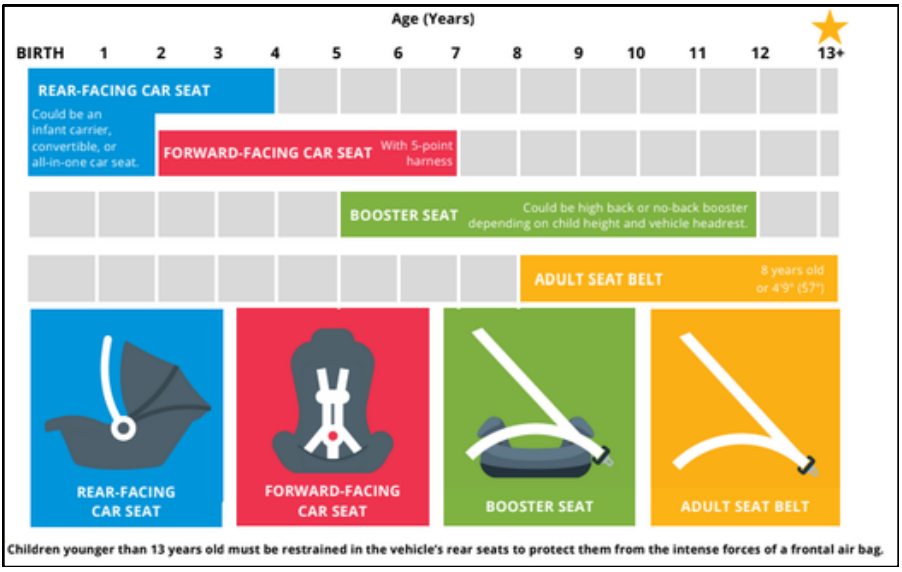
Car Seat Regulations:

According to updated laws as of April 2025, children must be secured in a car seat that is appropriate for their weight and height as indicated by the car seat's manufacturer. These updates state:

- **Infant to 2 years:** A child must be in a rear-facing car seat until they reach the maximum weight or height allowed by the car seat's manufacturer or the child is 2 years old.

- **Ages 2-5:** The child can then move into a forward-facing car seat until they reach the maximum weight or height allowed by the car seat's manufacturer or the child is 5 years old.
- **Ages 5-8:** The child can then move to a belt-positioning booster seat using a lap and shoulder belt until they are 4'9" or 8 years old.
- **Under 13:** Children must ride in the rear seat of a vehicle when available. Never place children under 13 in the front seat of a vehicle with a passenger-side airbag; they should be secured in the back seat.

Only use old child safety seats if they have never been in a crash and are within the manufacturer's lifespan (typically 6 years old). Always check for all parts, functionality, and recalls before use. Car seats are not for low-speed vehicles that lack federal safety standards.



Quick Tips:

- Properly position the harness on the child.
- Rear-facing - At or below the child's shoulders.
- Forward-facing - At or above the child's shoulders.
- Harness straps should lie flat, not twisted.
- The harness should be snug, without slack. It is snug enough when extra material cannot be pinched at the shoulders and hips.
- Make sure the chest clip is at armpit level.
- Lock your seat belt (see owner's manual) or use your vehicle's LATCH system.

Reporting Road Safety Issues

If you experience difficulty when traveling a road due to poor road conditions - such as intersection alignment creating turning conflicts, malfunctioning traffic signals, poor shoulder conditions, and poor sight distance/visibility due to trees or embankments - you should contact your local municipal officials to report the problem.

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