

Don't be left confused

“The rider of a bicycle must not ride past, or overtake, to the left of a vehicle that is turning left and is giving a left change of direction signal.” Sound simple enough? As **Emma Clark** finds out, it's not that straightforward.



Bike riders have a unique right to overtake on the left of cars in most situations, but there is an important exception that all riders should be aware of. According to national road safety rules, if a car is indicating and turning left, a bike rider cannot overtake on their left, and must let the car turn first, even though it may be cutting across a bike lane.

The rule is particularly relevant to city riding, as long lines of cars indicating that they will be turning left can form at busy intersections. The question then arises: is a bike rider legally able to pass all these indicating cars, and if so, who should they give way to?

According to the legal advice we have received, the key here is in the two conditions required of the car: not only must it be indicating, it must also be in the act of turning. Merely an indication they will be turning left further up the road does not prevent you overtaking cars in a stationary line of traffic. But once they begin to move, there may be complications.

Arty Lavos, Victorian Police State Bicycle Coordinator, told *Ride On* that when the leading vehicle in the line begins to turn left, you cannot pass it, even if it subsequently stops the turn because a line of pedestrians are preventing it going any further. Because it has begun turning left, and is indicating it is turning left, you cannot overtake on its left.

And as it finally turns left and the other cars in the stream follow on, you must give way to all those cars that are turning also.

So what is a bike rider who wants to go through the intersection to do? If you can, try to get ahead of the traffic while your lights are red, so you don't have to overtake any cars once the lights change to green. If there is a bike box, occupy it.

But there may not always be time to get to the front of the line of traffic. If you can't get through, you can join the line of traffic, occupy the middle of the lane, and move off when the way ahead is clear.

And what if a bike and car are travelling side by side and the driver then indicates a left turn? Our interpretation of the regulations is that the left turning vehicle must clearly pass the bike before it begins its turn. This leads to what is a fairly common situation; a bike approaches an intersection and a car suddenly accelerates past and cuts in front of the bike to turn left.

If the car's manoeuvre can be deemed dangerous driving because it hasn't given the rider reasonable time to react and give way, then the driver has breached the road rules. Wise practice is to be suspicious of a car that suddenly powers ahead towards an intersection. If you have time to react, pull back until you are sure of its intentions. ☹

