

# A Review of Bicycle Safety Campaigns

Primarily in the U.S.

- Campaign tactics and styles
- How to get the word out
- Messaging on multiple levels
- Other interesting tactics



# What should a campaign look like?

In the U.S., most bicycle safety campaigns focus on informing road users rather than on convincing behavior change.

It's easier and cheaper to provide information (laws, suggested behavior, etc) than to develop a campaign that captures peoples' emotions.

But, comprehensive studies of road safety campaigns conclude that emotional campaigns are more effective at increasing safety than informational campaigns.

**We need more emotionally-targeted bicycle safety campaigns and fewer information-laden, acronym-heavy outreach efforts.**

General road safety campaign studies have concluded that emotional campaigns that depend on fear are often the most effective.

In the US, bicycling already has a strong association with fear, which discourages more people from riding bikes.

We want to avoid fear-based emotional campaigns so as not to perpetuate the perception that cycling is very dangerous.

**Safety campaigns that personalize and humanize cyclists are ideal.**

Here are some examples of emotional safety campaigns that avoid fear tactics...

## Washington County Bicycle Transportation Coalition's [“And We Bike”](#) campaign

Life-sized cutouts of people with their bikes

Remind motorists that bicyclists are their relatives, friends, coworkers and neighbors

Message is, “Be careful; the cyclist could be someone you know.”



## David Zabriskie's [“Yield to Life”](#) campaign



“It is my mission to **humanize** and **personalize** cyclists to help motorists to always be aware that we are ‘life’ and that we deserve a safe space on the road.”

A screenshot of the Yield to Life website homepage. The page features a dark background with a central image of David Zabriskie standing on a road. The text on the page includes the Yield to Life logo, a navigation menu, a main message, a "Make a Donation" button, and three main content areas: "SAFETY TIPS & ROAD RULES", "Y2L PROGRAMS", and "YOUR SUPPORT".

 yieldtolife

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We all travel life's roads.  
I stand before you to ask for your cooperation  
in providing safe space for cyclists.  
When you see a cyclist on the road, please, yield to life.

DAVID ZABRISKIE, world-class cyclist and founder of Yield to Life

[Make a Donation](#)

 SAFETY TIPS & ROAD RULES

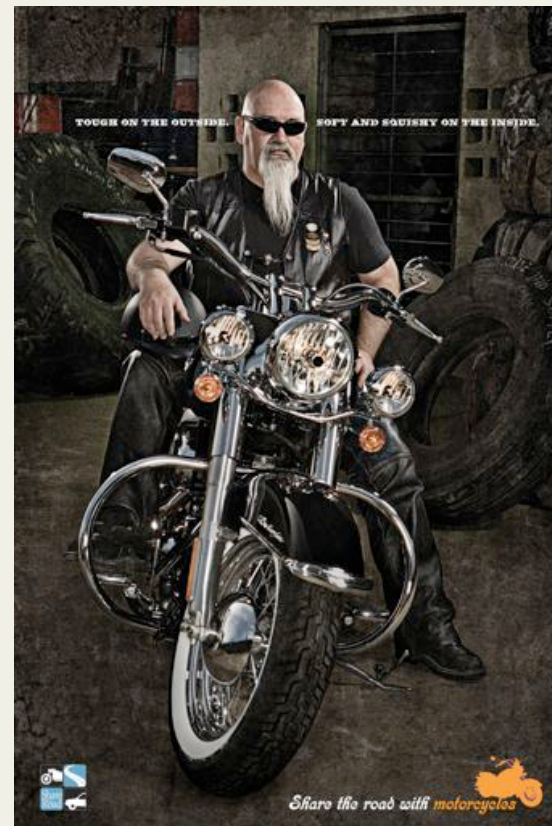
 Y2L PROGRAMS

 YOUR SUPPORT

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## NHTSA's [“Share the Road with Motorcycles”](#) campaign

“The headline [on ad at right], which reads ‘Tough on the Outside. Soft and Squishy on the Inside’ reminds readers that as tough as some bikers may be, we are all susceptible to potential accidents and injuries.”



# How to get the word out

Common vehicles for distributing a bicycle safety campaign's message are swag, informational pamphlets and brochures, and memorial rides.

Too often these materials reach a narrow audience and either are too full of information to be easily processed (pamphlets) or lacking in any information (rides).

**A successful bicycle safety campaign would deliver an easy-to-understand message to a wide range and large number of people, including both motorists and cyclists.**

Here are some examples of safety campaigns that use creative messaging tactics to increase exposure...

## Transport for London's [“Do the Test”](#) campaign

Videos spread virally on the Internet (6.3 million YouTube views)



Toronto's [“Watch for Bikes” campaign](#) gave out 150,000 side mirror stickers

**The DOOR Prize!**

Injures hundreds of Toronto cyclists every year.

**Congratulations!**

**1st prize** — You've just injured a cyclist by opening your door into traffic.

**2nd prize** — A \$110 fine and 2 demerit points.  
— A call from your insurance broker.

Car mirror stickers also distributed to cars and cabs in San Francisco, CA and Cambridge, MA, where they come with every parking permit.

**Avoid the Door Prize** Put this sticker on your driver's side mirror & watch for bikes before you open your door.

watch for bikes

**TORONTO** [www.toronto.ca/cycling](http://www.toronto.ca/cycling)

Cyclists, learn to avoid hazards—take CAN-BIKE

## WashCoBTC's [“And We Bike”](#) campaign: Traffic Awareness Days

Roadside events at various high traffic intersections with volunteers holding signs to raise awareness of bicycles on roadways and to promote the campaign.



Similarly, Marin County Bike Coalition passes out literature at [“Share the Road Checkpoints”](#)

## Transportation Alternatives' "Give Respect Get Respect" campaign

Fake summons

Gives cyclists an alternative to violence to get "justice"

Informs motorists without overloading them with information

Explains cyclists' behavior and how motorists can endanger them

DRIVERS! 司机! CONDUCTORES!

YOU HAVE VIOLATED NYC VEHICLE & TRAFFIC LAW AND

**YOU HAVE ENDANGERED  
A CYCLIST'S LIFE**

- BLOCKING A BIKE LANE** Driving, standing or parking in a bicycle lane is not only against the law—it is dangerous! Blocking the bicycle lane forces cyclists to swerve suddenly into fast-moving traffic.
- TURNING WITHOUT LOOKING OR SIGNALING** Cyclists travelling straight are endangered by cars turning without warning. Before you turn, always signal! Check your mirrors to ensure that no cyclist is riding along side you.
- SPEEDING** It is illegal to drive over 30 mph anywhere in NYC. Drivers that speed pose a special risk to cyclists and pedestrians. By rushing to get somewhere, you risk severely hurting or killing someone. Please slow down!
- OPENING A VEHICLE DOOR WITHOUT LOOKING** If you don't look first, you may open your door right into the path of a cyclist. NYC Traffic Law says you have to look first! It could save a biker's life.
- DOUBLE PARKING** When you double park, you force cyclists to ride in the middle of the road, where cars aren't expecting them. Plus, you risk a hefty fine.

**Transportation Alternatives** (212) 629-8080 [transalt.org](http://transalt.org)  
127 West 26th Street, Suite 1002, NYC 10001

**THIS IS A FAKE SUMMONS** You have been given this summons as part of Transportation Alternatives' campaign to increase awareness among drivers about dangerous conditions cyclists face on the road.

## One Less Car's [“Community Pace Car”](#) campaign

“...gives Maryland residents a chance to impact traffic safety by taking charge of their neighborhood streets. People who sign the Community Pace Car pledge... agree to put the Maryland Community Pace Car sticker on the back of their car and to actually obey the posted speed limit in their neighborhoods, thereby acting as a “pace car” for other motorists. Only a small percentage of vehicles acting as pace cars can effectively slow motor vehicle traffic in a neighborhood. When enough people join, traffic can be calmed city or county-wide. This makes conditions safer for bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users. As safety conditions improve, people feel more comfortable walking, cycling or just waiting for the bus.”



1. I will drive within the speed limit on all community streets in Maryland.
2. I'll treat all pedestrians with respect and will share the road safely with them.
3. I'll treat all bicyclists with respect and only pass them when I can give them at least 3 feet of safe clearance.
4. I'll give myself enough travel time so that I'm not sacrificing courtesy or safety.
5. I will not be pressured by other driver's impatience to drive above the posted speed limit.
6. I will devote my full attention to driving and avoid distractions such as cell phones.
7. I will choose to DRIVE LESS by walking, bicycling and taking mass transit when I can in order to reduce traffic, save money and improve the environment in my community.

# Messaging: working on multiple levels

What message a bicycle safety campaign communicates, beyond simple bicycle safety, can determine its effectiveness.

Many campaigns are one-sided: simply telling motorists what they do wrong.

Imbalanced campaign messaging might only serve to divide the motorist and cyclist communities and keep cycling a fringe mode.

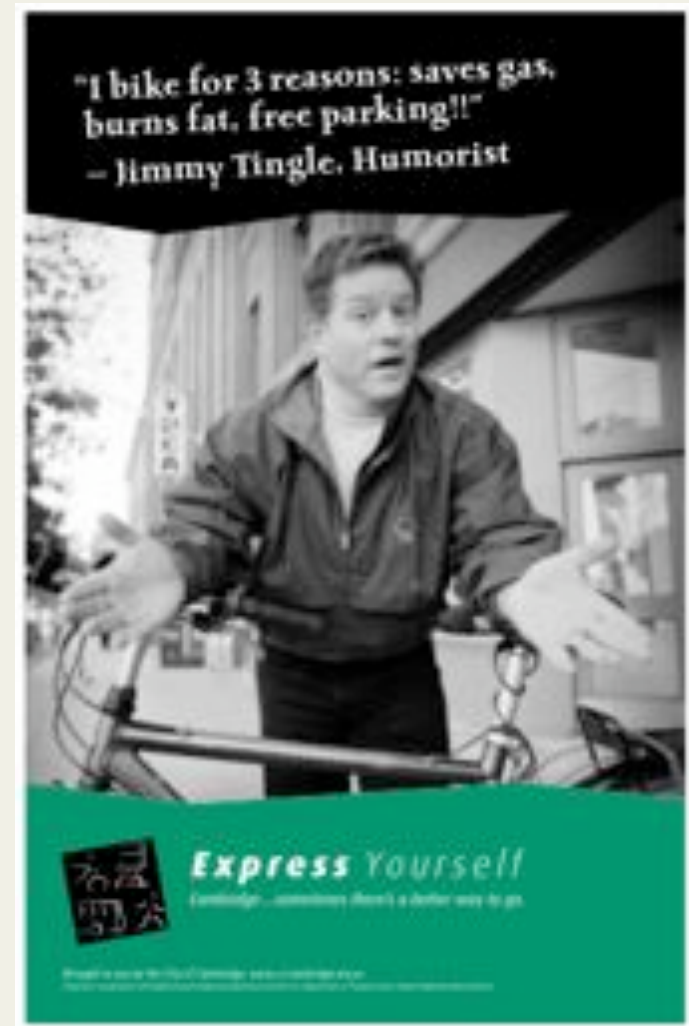
Campaigns that speak to both groups and make cycling look like more of a mainstream, ordinary mode of transport are ideal.

**The more cyclists there are, the safer cycling gets; so, a safety campaign that indirectly encourages more people to cycle (and all road users to ride or drive safely) is ideal.**

Here are some safety campaigns that present cycling as a more mainstream transportation option and work to diffuse tension between cyclists and motorists, often with eye-catching photography of real people...

## Cambridge, MA's [“Express Yourself”](#) campaign

“Approach: Use an emotional (versus rational) approach to selling alternative transportation. Make walking, biking, and public transportation appear fun and hip, while recognizing that never driving is not realistic.”



## “Safety is Sexy” campaign

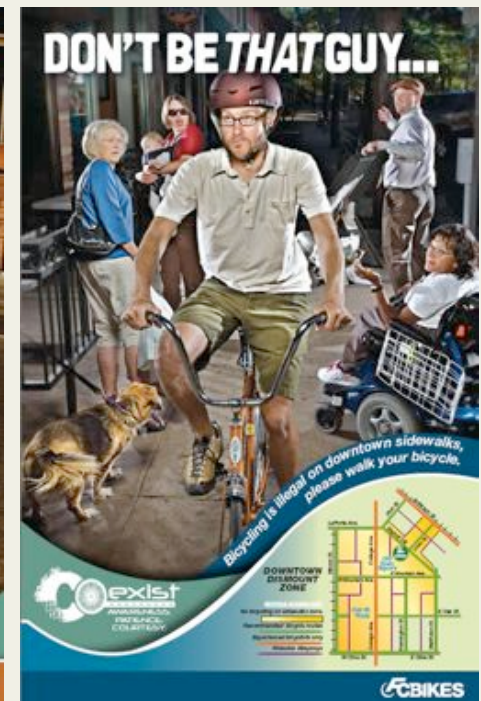
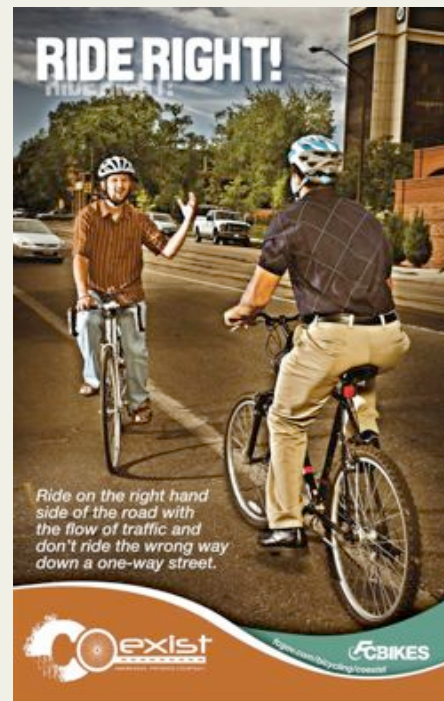
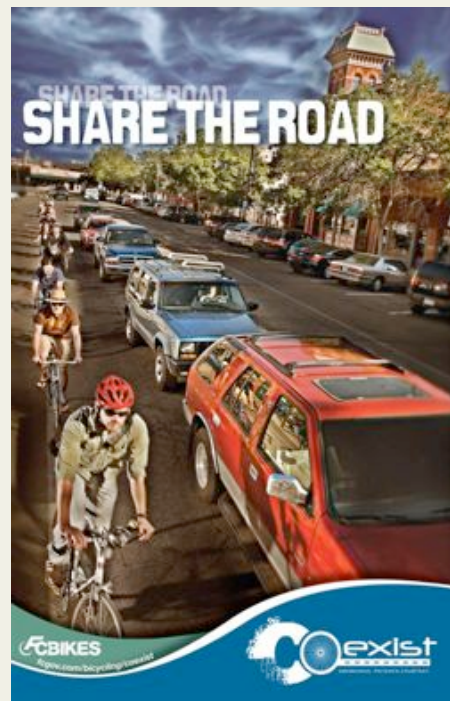
“Mission: To erase the stigma that wearing a helmet is dorky or uncool and to encourage the idea that wearing a helmet is attractive, cool and smart.”



Urban-adult-centric [blog](#) with short, cool posts about helmet safety, including retro helmet ads and campaigns, new commuter helmet fashions, and celebrity helmet wearing.

## Fort Collins, CO's "Coexist" campaign

Posters speak to both drivers and cyclists. Cyclists are dressed casually and (for the most part) look like ordinary—even hip—people going about everyday business on bikes. The images in this campaign are eye-catching, but some of the crash scenarios depicted might scare away potential cyclists in those communities where the bike mode share is extremely low.



## San Francisco's "Coexist" campaign



Like the Fort Collins campaign, this one uses vivid and interesting photos of 'hip' people cycling to present the ideal action in dangerous scenarios. It also shares the goal of "encouraging greater respect between cyclists and motorists."



## NYC's "Look" Campaign

Again, we see arresting photographs at the center of this campaign. The posters (left) speak to drivers, and the postcards (right) are directed at cyclists. Ideally, an ad would speak to both groups in the same document to prevent finger-pointing (this is an issue with the Fort Collins and San Francisco ads too.) Neither group wants to be singled out. With a balanced campaign, each group might be more willing to accept the message.




## Cascade Bicycle Club's "Give 3 Feet" campaign

Catchy photo and logo



whatever it takes to remember.

give cyclists  of space.

 | [www.give3feet.org](http://www.give3feet.org)

 GroupHealth


# Other interesting campaign tactics

## Explain cyclist behavior

Explain to motorists why cyclists might behave the way they do. Non-cycling drivers don't understand some safe cyclist behavior (e.g. "taking the lane") and perceive it as a threat. The more drivers understand about how bike riders behave, the better. Signage that does this at confusing junctions helps too.


VT Bike and Pedestrian Coalition's ["General Store Flyer"](#) explains to motorists why bike riders might not always be hugging the shoulder.

### LEGAL RIGHT to the road

 **SLOW DOWN**

- + Wait until it's safe to pass. (Give at least 3 feet.)
- + Illegal to pass on blind corners or hills.
- + Yield to bicyclists & pedestrians when you turn.

*Why's that bicyclist riding so far left in the road? There might be potholes or sand over on the edge. He or she might be turning left. Or he or she might be letting you know the lane isn't wide enough to safely pass.*

 **RIDE RIGHT**

- + Drive your bike on the right, with traffic.
- + Obey signs & signals. You have the same rights & responsibilities as motorists.
- + State law requires a white headlight & red rear reflector at night. A rear light is smart, too!

## Get into the system

Distribute bicycle safety tips with all **parking permits** – Cambridge, MA

Create Share the Road **license plates** – Various states

Reduce motorists' traffic violation fines if they take **classes** on bike safety – Marin County, Portland, OR

Integrate kids' bicycle safety education is into **phys. ed. classes** with the help of the local police department – Cambridge, MA

**Educate law enforcement** on bicycle safety and laws, and even partner with them to enforce bike safety – Louisville, KY, Cambridge, MA, and Columbia, MO

Make bicycle safety a large component of **driver education** – Denmark, Netherlands

Have a significant bicycle safety **education curriculum** in schools. In the Netherlands, primary schools strive to achieve a “Traffic Safety Label”

## Consider all parts of a community

Use **bilingual messages** in areas with a significant non-English speaking population

Provide **free or discounted safety equipment** like helmets, lights, reflectors, and bells to low-income bicyclists – Cambridge, MA and Portland, OR's Bicycling Transportation Alliance

Provide **free bike safety checks and helmet fittings** to low-income bicyclists – Washington Country Bicycle Transportation Coalition

# Conclusions + Best Practices

**Target emotions rather than relying on information and acronyms**

**Personalize and humanize cyclists; avoid fear**

**Deliver an easy-to-understand message to a wide range and large number of people, including both motorists and cyclists**

**Indirectly encourage more people to cycle; there's safety in numbers**

**Explain cyclist behavior**

**Get into the system**

**Remember all parts of a community**

