



## a metre matters – questions and answers

Question	Answer
1. What is the Minimum Overtaking Distance (also known as the <b>a metre matters</b> ) rule	When overtaking a bicycle, drivers must allow a minimum distance of: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 metre when the speed limit is 60km/h or less</li> <li>1.5 metres when the speed limit is more than 60km/h</li> </ol>
2. Why do we need a minimum overtaking distance for bicycle riders?	Because it will help to reduce crashes between motor vehicles and bicycle riders. It will make bicycle riders feel safer. Bicycle riders need to be protected. They don't have a metal car or truck to protect their bodies. They are more likely to be injured or killed if a crash happens.
3. Why one metre and not more, or less?	One metre is a practical distance. It's the <i>minimum</i> distance; drivers can leave more if they want to and it's safe to do so.
4. Why a new law? Aren't the current road rules good enough?	<p>This is not a new road rule – it's an amendment to the existing road rules and is based on the current guidelines for drivers in most jurisdictions<sup>1</sup>. Guidelines for drivers and the actual road rules will now be consistent.</p> <p>The existing rule requires drivers to provide a 'sufficient' distance and this is subjective. One metre is clear and objective. It gives more certainty for drivers, bicycle riders and police.</p>
5. How is the minimum overtaking distance measured?	It's the space between the bicycle and the vehicle. The distance is measured from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the rightmost part of the bicycle, or the person on the bicycle; to</li> <li>▪ the leftmost part of the vehicle, or something projecting from the vehicle (e.g. mirror)</li> </ul>
6. Isn't it difficult to measure a metre?	<p>No. A metre is a practical measure which most people can judge easily.</p> <p>It is standard practice to use measurements in the Australian Road Rules that are clear, effective and enforceable. Distances are specified in at least 36 Australian Road Rules.</p>

<sup>1</sup> For example, in Victoria, VicRoads Bike Riders and Sharing the Road <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/safety-and-road-rules/cyclist-safety/sharing-the-road>; also in *Road to Solo Driving handbook Part 4, p36* <https://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/licences/your-Is/your-learner-handbooks>

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7. Can I leave more than a metre if I want to?	Sure you can - one metre is the <i>minimum</i> distance. You can leave a greater distance where there is space on the road and it is safe to do so.
8. What should I do if I can't give a metre or more because of oncoming traffic or if there is a median strip?	You must slow down and wait until the road conditions change, and it is safe to overtake the bike rider providing the minimum overtaking distance.
9. Why legislate? Aren't most drivers giving enough space anyway?	<p>The road rules need to be amended to permit drivers to allow a metre in all circumstances. The current road rules permit drivers to cross solid lines to avoid an obstruction when there is a clear view of traffic, and it is necessary and reasonable to do so. However, it is currently not permitted to do so to safely overtake a bicycle ride.</p> <p><b>a metre matters</b> calls for an amendment to this road rule to permit drivers to cross solid lines to overtake bicycle riders, when safe to do so.</p>
10. Can I cross centre lines to overtake a bicycle rider?	<p>Yes. To overtake a bicycle rider, provided you have a clear view of traffic and it is safe to do so, you can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Drive over centre lines on a two-way road (new rule)</li> <li>• Straddle or cross a lane line on a multi-lane road, including a continuous lane line (new rule)</li> <li>• Drive on a painted island to overtake a bicycle rider on a multi-lane road (new rule)</li> <li>• Cross the centre of the road where there is a broken centre line or no centre line</li> </ul> <p>Where there is no clear view ahead or it is not safe, a driver will need to slow down behind the bicycle rider and wait until it is safe to overtake with the minimum distance.</p>
11. Why not just add a bicycle lane to every road or footpath? Wouldn't this be safer for everyone?	Better infrastructure is critical for safe cycling but we cannot afford to wait for safe cycling infrastructure to be built. Separated bike lanes will never be in every street in Australia. An immediate way to make bicycle riders safer on every road is for drivers to give them enough space.
12. Do I have to give a metre or more when overtaking a bicycle rider in a bicycle lane?	Yes. You must give the minimum distance when you overtake any bicycle rider, in or out of a bicycle lane.
13. Sometimes on a narrow or winding road, or a laneway, there isn't enough room to overtake a bike rider. How can I leave a metre then?	If there isn't space, you have to wait. This is no different to the current road rules which state that you must not overtake any vehicle, including a bike rider, unless there is enough space to do so safely.
14. What happens if I need to overtake two bicycle riders cycling beside each other?	You will need to provide the minimum overtaking distance. Bicycle riders can legally ride side-by-side, two abreast, as long as they are not more than 1.5 metres apart.
15. Will this slow down traffic	Drivers may need to slow to overtake a bicycle rider safely

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and make congestion worse?	but there is no evidence that this increases vehicle congestion.
16. Isn't an overtaking distance law a backward step that would leave bicycle riders more vulnerable?	<p>Currently road rules state that drivers need to allow 'sufficient distance', and this is determined by the driver's discretion. 'Sufficient' provides drivers with no guidance about a minimum safe distance.</p> <p>Countries in Europe including France and Belgium, and nearly half the states in the USA have minimum overtaking distance laws.</p>
17. Why don't bicycle riders have to leave a metre when overtaking pedestrians?	<b>a metre matters</b> focuses on the safety of bicycle riders when sharing the road with motor vehicles.
18. Why legislate? Wouldn't a good advertising campaign work better?	A combination of legislation, education and enforcement is needed to achieve behaviour change on the roads. Successful road safety campaigns (e.g. to reduce drink driving, increase seat belt use) have clearly shown the need for all three components to improve safety on our roads.
19. Will there be a widespread campaign to let people know about the changes?	Yes. Every state or territory that has mandated or is trialling the minimum overtaking distance has backed it up with effective public awareness campaigns. The <i>Stay wider of the rider</i> in Queensland, for example, was judged effective by 75% of Queenslanders in community attitude research.
20. It's too complicated – it won't work!	<p>It does. Our experience shows that amending road rules to mandate a minimum overtaking distance works. The majority of bicycle riders in Queensland reported an increase in the space drivers give them since the trial started in April 2014.<sup>2</sup> Over half of South Australian bicycle riders said drivers observed the amended rules.<sup>3</sup></p> <p>A senior Queensland Police representative said that his initial scepticism had been overturned and that he '<i> marvelled at the observable change in behaviour </i>' he had seen on the roads.</p>
21. How will the rule be enforced?	<p>Police will enforce the minimum overtaking distance just like they enforce all road rules.</p> <p>A Queensland police Sergeant said "<i>The previous road rule was very difficult to enforce, there was no objective standard for what was 'sufficient'. Now we have a clear cut definition</i>".</p> <p>The Queensland Police Commissioner believes it has made their job easier.</p>
22. What's the fine if I don't leave the minimum overtaking distance?	This varies between the states and territories that have introduced or are trialling the minimum overtaking distance laws. Penalties include demerit points and fines ranging from: 2 demerit points, \$280 (SA) to 3 demerit points, \$353 (Qld).
23. This is yet another	It will reduce risk for drivers too - no driver wants to hit a

<sup>2</sup> Crosby & Textor, *Public opinion research into the Queensland Government's trial of the minimum overtaking distance legislation commissioned by the Amy Gillet Foundation*, October 2015

<sup>3</sup> Bike SA survey, October 2015

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concession to bicycle riders. What's in it for drivers?	bicycle rider. The minimum overtaking distance amendment tells drivers how to overtake bicycle riders safely. The current rules are unclear and subjective, and have potentially fatal outcomes.  Drivers in community attitude research from Queensland, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory strongly supported the amended road rules <sup>4,5,6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Crosby & Textor, *Public opinion research into the Queensland Government's trial of the minimum overtaking distance legislation commissioned by the Amy Gillet Foundation*, October 2015

<sup>5</sup> 73% of respondents to a SA Government survey supported the proposed minimum overtaking distances. 65% of South Australians agree with the minimum overtaking distance, Crosby & Textor, *South Australian community attitudes towards bicycle riders and the minimum overtaking distance: benchmark research October 2015*. 88% of ACT residents were at least 'somewhat supportive' of a minimum overtaking distance, ACT Government Cycling Reform Pre-Trial Study, Micromex Research, September 2015

<sup>6</sup> Online Victorian survey 2014, Tierney, P. *Review of Victorian Cycling Related Road Rules & Legislation: summary report for VicRoads*, March 2015.