

## THE GREENVILLE NEWS EDITORIAL

## Safe cycling's a two-way street

New laws enacted last year can help make bicyclists safer on the Upstate's roads if they are uniformly enforced by state and local law enforcement. Just as important is training both drivers and cyclists to be aware of one another when they share those roads.

According to a recent *Greenville News* report, South Carolina is third in the nation in the number of fatalities due to vehicle-bicycle crashes, with 20 reported in 2007. The rate of fatalities was 4.54 per million people in 2007, nearly double the national average.

In 2008, the year the new rules were implemented, fatalities in bicy-

cle-car crashes dropped to 14, though the state still averaged nearly 18 such fatalities per year from 2004-2008, according to data from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

Geography and driving habits most certainly play a role in such accidents. Upstate roads often are twisting and narrow, and traffic can move swiftly. That can put cyclists in a precarious position. The conditions make it important for drivers to watch out for bicyclists.

The fact that this area is a hotbed of recreational cycling enhances the risk. On any given weekend, many of the Upstate's rural and suburban roads — often the least

equipped for cyclists — are shared by both automobiles and bikes.

But it should be remembered, not everyone who's riding a bike on Upstate roads is a recreational cyclist. Many Upstate residents rely on bicycles as a primary mode of transportation to get to work or school. During the morning or afternoon rush hours, drivers can see large numbers of cyclists on the roads as well.

Because of the high number of accidents and to protect the increasing number of cyclists, laws were enacted in 2008 that allow for stiffer penalties for drivers in vehicle-bicycle collisions. The law requires drivers to main-

tain a "safe operating distance" from cyclists, according to a recent *Greenville News* story. Failure to follow the law can result in a fine of up to \$1,000 if an incident causes injuries.

These are reasonable laws. However, according to the newspaper report, they are not always used by law enforcement.

The Greenville Police Department and the Greenville County Sheriff's Office have trained officers on the new laws. All agencies should do so. Police officers should use the new laws when given the unfortunate opportunity. As drivers become aware of the stiffer penalties, they will begin to understand the impor-

ance of being courteous to bicyclists.

At the same time, cycling advocates are right to point out that safe cycling is a two-way street. Motorists definitely have a responsibility to watch out for bicycles, but cyclists have a responsibility to be aware that they are traveling on roads with vehicles that are larger and faster than theirs, and often on roads far too narrow to comfortably accommodate both cars and bicycles. That means cyclists need to carefully follow their own safety rules to minimize their risk.

The bottom line is that if everyone follows the rules, then everyone can share the road safely.