

BACK-TO-SCHOOL TRAFFIC: WHAT WASHINGTON RIDERS NEED TO KNOW

SLOW DOWN | CREATE SPACE | STAY VISIBLE | EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED



School is back - and traffic patterns change.

Morning arrival and afternoon dismissal bring school buses, parents, new teen drivers, crossing guards, bicyclists and pedestrians together in the same places. For a motorcyclist, that means more sudden stops, more blocked sight lines and more unpredictable movement. Ride with extra time and extra space.

WASHINGTON SCHOOL ZONES

Where a marked school or playground crosswalk is fully posted, Washington law generally sets a 20 mph maximum while the school/playground speed restriction applies. Slow before the zone, scan sidewalks and crosswalks, and be ready to stop.

Give School Buses Extra Space

A school bus is a moving warning that the traffic pattern may change quickly. Increase your following distance, cover the brakes and look well beyond the bus. Watch for children who may cross in front of or behind it during loading and unloading. Never use the shoulder or a turn lane to get around a stopped bus.

Know When Washington Requires You to Stop

RCW 46.61.370: When a school bus is stopped to receive or discharge children and its required visual signals are operating, approaching drivers generally must stop before reaching the bus and remain stopped until the bus moves again or the signals are no longer activated. Opposite-direction traffic has exceptions on divided highways and highways with three or more marked traffic lanes. Same-direction traffic must stop.

Watch for New and Inexperienced Drivers

Back-to-school traffic includes young drivers who may make abrupt lane changes, brake late, miss a blind-spot check or turn at the last moment. Defensive riding means leaving yourself time, space and a safe way out before something goes wrong.

**RIDER'S HABIT: Look farther ahead than the vehicle directly in front of you.
Identify the next conflict before it becomes your emergency.**

Photo used as a roadway-safety illustration. Washington law references: RCW 46.61.370 and RCW 46.61.440.

BE SEEN - DON'T BE HIDDEN

Large vehicles have blind spots - and they can also block OTHER drivers from seeing your motorcycle.



The Mirror Test

If you cannot see the truck or bus driver's face in the mirror, assume the driver cannot see you. Do not linger beside a large vehicle. Move to a position where you are clearly visible, or create more distance.

Don't Let the Big Vehicle Hide You

At an intersection, a school bus, truck, van or SUV can screen a motorcycle from an oncoming driver or a vehicle waiting to turn. Avoid riding alongside a large vehicle into the intersection. Create a sight line so crossing and turning traffic can see you **before** you enter the conflict area.

Give Wide Turns Room

Buses and trucks may swing outward before turning and need more space to complete the turn. Never squeeze between a turning large vehicle and the curb or shoulder.

RIDE WITH A PLAN

- ✓ Watch for school zones
- ✓ Leave extra following distance
- ✓ Cover the brakes near buses and crossings
- ✓ Look beyond the vehicle ahead
- ✓ Identify a safe escape path
- ✓ Stay where large-vehicle drivers can see you
- ✓ Do not ride hidden beside a large vehicle through an intersection
- ✓ Expect sudden stops and last-minute turns
- ✓ Re-scan before accelerating after a bus stop clears

CAN THE DRIVER SEE ME?

CAN I SEE THE DRIVER?

CAN OTHER TRAFFIC SEE ME?

Sources and inspiration: Florida Motorcycle Safety Program, *Florida Freedom* Summer 2026 back-to-school feature (rider planning, extra bus space, new-driver awareness); Washington RCW 46.61.370 and 46.61.440; Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration, Our Roads, Our Safety guidance on large-vehicle blind spots and wide turns. This Washington adaptation is a general rider-safety reminder and not legal advice.