

Triggering Traffic Lights with Bicycles



The Regional Transportation Commission has launched a hot line for people to call with complaints about traffic signals: 335-ROAD (7623). Jim Poston, RTC Traffic Engineer offers the following tips to bicyclists needing to get their presence recognized so a signal will change.

For **loop detectors** [seen above], try to ride in a wheel path, not in the middle of the lane. A traffic lane is about 12 feet wide, and a detector loop is about six feet by six feet, so the edges of the loop are about three feet in from either side of the lane. If the loop hasn't been paved over, you can see the saw cut lines filled in with black sealant. If the loop has been paved over, just try the wheel paths.



In general, the middle of the lane should be avoided by motorcycles and bicycles because that's where oil drips tend to be which can make the area more slippery.

For bicycles, the rims (both steel and aluminum) are what gets detected. Even being a couple of inches away from the loop lines can cause a bicycle to be undetected. It can sometimes help to lay a bicycle down.

For **video detectors**, the center of the lane is probably best – this is unfortunate for bicycle and motorcycle riders because as mentioned above this is the area that tends to have more oil. Having a headlight turned on can help because the camera is looking for a change in contrast. Waving your arms might add enough contrast for the camera to notice you.

What can cause a camera not to detect a vehicle? It could be a light car on a light pavement due to the lack of contrast, or the sun might be shining directly into the camera in early morning. In cases like this, the problem is intermittent.

Both loops and video detectors can be set to be quite sensitive; but that can lead to detectors overreacting to traffic in the other direction, moving shadows, or changes in temperature or moisture. Consequently, technicians try to compromise when programming the equipment.

If you have trouble with any signals that won't change, call 335-ROAD (7623), to report the problem.