



Pedestrian safety and the ACT Road Rules Handbook

Summary and recommendations

Road safety can be improved by modifying the ACT Road Rules Handbook to:

- include diagrams that clearly illustrate drivers giving way to pedestrians (or vice versa) in a range of situations including slip lanes, T-intersections, stop signs and stop lines, and when turning across divided roads;
- modify existing diagrams so that they more clearly illustrate drivers giving way to pedestrians when crossing between roads and road-related areas, and when turning at 4-way intersections;
- correct the explanation of what is a “road-related area.”
- include an explanation that “traffic” includes pedestrians; and
- where appropriate, replace the terms “vehicles” and “other drivers” with the terms “traffic” and “other road users.”

Road safety can also be improved by changing the ACT Road Rules, to:

- address giving way when pedestrians walk into the face of oncoming vehicles; and
- reduce the complexity of give way rules (e.g. giving way to pedestrians and/or bicycles when turning left at a give way line).

Background

Some ACT Road Rules (e.g. giving way to pedestrians when turning) are poorly observed by many Canberra drivers, and probably poorly understood by many pedestrians. This causes unnecessary disorder when pedestrians attempt to cross roads, resulting in increased road danger and congestion.

It may also discourage people from walking, reducing mobility for non-drivers and encouraging others to drive rather than walk, thus adding further to traffic congestion and vehicle emissions.

At Pedal Power’s pre-election forum in October 2008, representatives of the Labor, Liberal and Greens parties all agreed on the need to educate all road users about their rights and responsibilities in relation to other road users. The Sustainable Transport Strategy and *Weathering the Change* – The ACT Climate Change Strategy 2007-2025 – both call for increased walking and reduced motor vehicle use.

The ACT Road Rules Handbook is the primary source of Road Rules education for Canberra drivers and pedestrians. It is important that the Handbook provides clear, complete and accurate information about the road rules. The Handbook is due to be revised in early 2010.

The current version handbook is largely complete and accurate, but its clarity in relation to pedestrian issues is drastically in need of improvement. Specific issues include:

- Terminology and clarity.
- Diagrams to illustrate drivers giving way to pedestrians.
- Including giving way to pedestrians, under specific contextual headings.
- Giving Way to pedestrians at a Stop Sign or Stop Line.
- Pedestrians walking along streets.

Terminology and clarity

The term “traffic” is used frequently in the Handbook. Nowhere in the Handbook does it explain that, as stated in the Australian Road Rules Dictionary, “**traffic** includes vehicles and pedestrians.”

Several statements in the Handbook use the term “vehicles” in circumstances which also apply to pedestrians. In these cases it would be more appropriate to replace the word “vehicles” with the word “traffic.”

Rules 74 and 75 require a driver to give way to pedestrians when driving between a *road* and a *road-related area*. This distinction is especially difficult to understand in areas leading into and out of car parking areas – for example, the lanes in a car park that cars use to access parking spaces, and un-named streets near car parking areas, such as the street behind the Dickson library.

Rule 68 requires drivers, when approaching or at a Stop Sign or Stop Line, to give way to any pedestrian who is at or near the Stop sign or Stop line. There is no reference to this Rule in the section under “Traffic Signs” on page 31 of the Handbook.

The Handbook does not clarify whether drivers must give way to pedestrians who are crossing directly from one footpath to another, when the footpath crossing (as indicated by the tram ramp locations) is set back from the stop sign and/or the stop line.

Diagrams to illustrate drivers giving way to pedestrians

Giving way to pedestrians is arguably a more complex issue than giving way to vehicles, and so it warrants at least a comparable degree of focus. Yet while the Handbook uses more than 30 diagrams to illustrate giving way to vehicles, it includes only two diagrams that clearly illustrate giving way to pedestrians.

Take for example a driver approaching a T-junction along the terminating road, and planning to turn left into the continuing road. The driver’s intended trajectory conflicts with up to five other road user trajectories, out of a possible eight. Only one of these conflicting trajectories involves other motor vehicles.

Where it is practicable for pedestrians to travel on the footpath or nature strip, the conflicting trajectories are:

- Pedestrians and cyclists travelling along the continuing road and crossing the terminating between footpaths, from the driver’s left;
- Pedestrians and cyclists travelling along the continuing road and crossing the terminating between footpaths, from the driver’s right;
- Pedestrians and cyclists crossing the continuing road between footpaths, travelling towards the driver;

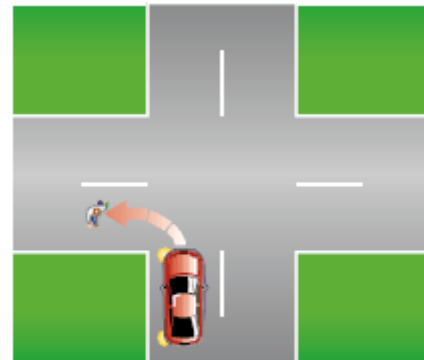
- Pedestrians and cyclists crossing the continuing road between footpaths, travelling away from the driver; and
- Drivers and cyclists travelling along the continuing road, from the driver's right.

Where it is NOT practicable for pedestrians to travel on the footpath or nature strip, the conflicting trajectories are:

- Pedestrians walking along the continuing road, from the driver's left to the driver's right;
- Pedestrians walking along the continuing road from the driver's left, and turning into the terminating road;
- Pedestrians walking along the continuing road from the driver's right, and turning into the terminating road; and
- Drivers and cyclists travelling along the continuing road, from the driver's right.

If you the reader have difficulty visualising these situations, then that demonstrates the need for the Handbook to show them diagrammatically.

In some cases the driver must give way to **either** cyclists **or** pedestrians, but not both. E.g. Rule 67 requires a driver at a stop sign to give way to bicycles (but not pedestrians) crossing between footpaths near the stop sign, and then if turning left to give way to pedestrians (but not bicycles) that are crossing the road the driver is entering.

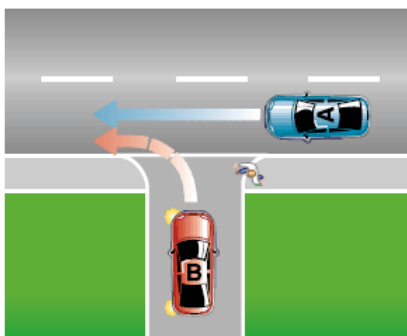


Example 4 - Driver turning left giving way to a pedestrian on the road the driver is entering.

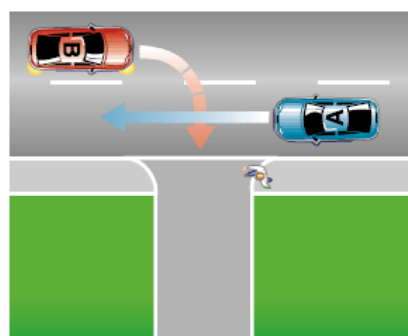
The current handbook includes only one, potentially misleading, illustration of a driver giving way to a pedestrian when turning left at an intersection ("Example 4," right).

Example 4 is potentially misleading because it does not clearly indicate the pedestrian's direction of travel. The driver is NOT required to give way to the pedestrian if the pedestrian is travelling along the road, from left to right. The same is also true of "Example 9" (which shows a driver turning right) for a pedestrian travelling from right to left.

The Handbook contains only two other diagrams (below) that illustrate drivers giving way to pedestrians. These diagrams illustrate giving way to pedestrians when entering or leaving a



Driver entering a road from a road-related area giving way to a pedestrian on the footpath and a vehicle on the road.



Example 1 - Driver turning right from a road into a road-related area giving way to an oncoming vehicle that is going straight ahead and to a pedestrian on the footpath.

road-related area. In both, the significance of giving way to the pedestrian is overshadowed both by the presence of a car (to which the driver must also give way) and by the addition of a large blue arrow that indicates the "right" of the car to continue in its direction of travel.

Under "Parking" (p.58) there are three diagrams showing where not to park on the road, but no diagrams showing not to park on a footpath or nature strip.

Including giving way to pedestrians, under specific contextual headings.

The current Handbook mentions many Rules several times, in different contexts. Some Rules that require drivers to give way to pedestrians are omitted, or mentioned only once, even though they apply in more than one context.

For example:

- Under "Intersections" on page 36, the Handbook gives a long list of examples of when drivers at intersections must give way.
 - The list omits giving way to pedestrians on slip lanes, and giving way to pedestrians who are crossing the road into which the driver is turning.
- Under "Intersections" on page 36, the Handbook concludes, "If in doubt, be prepared to give way to all other vehicles."
 - This could be amended to "... give way to all other **traffic**."
- Under "T-intersections" (p. 43) there is **no** mention of drivers giving way to pedestrians.
- Under "Unusual intersections" (p. 44) the Handbook concludes, "If in doubt, be prepared to give way to all other vehicles."
 - This could be amended to "... give way to all other **traffic**."
- When discussing slip lanes (p. 50) the Handbook states "*In the ACT, motorists **exiting** [my bolding emphasis] a slip lane **MUST** give way to **ALL** other traffic including **PEDESTRIANS** on the slip lane.*"
 - It could add that "motorists **on** a slip lane **MUST** give way to **PEDESTRIANS** on the slip lane."
- Under "Driving" (p.72), the Handbook says: "*Eye contact between **drivers** is important. It can allow you to anticipate and avoid mistakes by **other drivers or pedestrians**. Tune into the messages that other **drivers** are giving you. Look and listen and be prepared to react as required to **another driver's** communications.*"
 - It would be better to use the term "**road users**" in all these cases, and to include a diagram showing a driver and a pedestrian making mutual eye contact.
- Under "Braking and Stopping" (p.78) the diagram depicts braking to avoid colliding with a truck. It would be instructive to include diagrams that depict braking for other road users.
- Under "Pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and horse traffic," (p.97) the Handbook advises to "*watch for pedestrians*" in six situations. The list of situations could usefully be extended to include:
 - at intersections;

- near bus stops;
 - where a footpath or community path crosses the street, even if there isn't a pedestrian crossing;
 - on streets that do not have footpaths.
- Also on page 97 the handbook adds "You must give way to pedestrians when you are leaving private property such as driveways, or car parks, shopping centres and service stations."
 - The use of the term "private property" here is misleading, because the Rules 74 and 75 apply to all "road-related areas," irrespective of whether the land is privately or publicly owned (e.g. publicly owned car parks at shopping centres).

Pedestrians walking along streets

Walking along streets is a commonplace in the ACT, where less than 1,900 km of Canberra's 4,000 km of urban streets have footpaths. The Handbook states at page 97:

If you are a pedestrian walking along a road that does not have a footpath, you should walk on the right hand edge of the road facing oncoming traffic.

The Handbook provides no guidance on whether the pedestrian or the facing "oncoming traffic" should give way in this situation.

This issue does not seem to be addressed in the Australian Road Rules. It has been raised with the ACT representative on the Australian Road Rules (ARR) Maintenance Group. His response indicates that the ARR Maintenance Group places a lower value on deaths and injuries, than it places on traffic flow, and on property damage caused by drivers in breach of Rule 126: *Keeping a safe distance behind vehicles*:

... the car would have to stop suddenly, creating the likelihood of rear end collisions. There could be severe disruptions to traffic flow on the road in question. I envisage there would be strong opposition to this proposal from the national ARR Maintenance Group.

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