

Efforts to Realize Orderly Bicycle Traffic

(1) The current situation of bicycle accidents

In 2023, the number of traffic accidents involving bicycles increased for the third consecutive year. The number reached 72,339, causing accidents involving bicycles to account for their largest percentage of all traffic accidents in the past 20 years, 23.5%. At the same time, the number of pedestrian/cyclist accidents has also been increasing in recent years, reaching 3,208, the highest number in the past 20 years, in 2023, of which about 40% occurred on sidewalks, where pedestrians should be prioritized over cyclists. Moreover, about 70% of fatal and serious injury accidents involving bicycles that occurred in 2023 were accounted for by cases in which cyclists committed a legal violation.

(2) Police efforts to promote safe use of bicycles

① Informing bicycle users of traffic rules

The police are working in cooperation with local governments, schools, bicycle-related business operators, and other involved parties to promote road safety education and awareness-building campaigns targeting bicycle users of all age groups to facilitate safer use of bicycles, and are endeavoring to ensure that all cyclists are informed about and observe the traffic rules that pertain to them. For example, participatory, practical, experience-oriented bicycle workshops are held at schools using bicycle simulators, etc., while information about the importance of observing traffic rules for cyclists is provided through proactive utilization of websites, social media, and other channels. In addition, given the fact that the Road Traffic Act requires people of all ages to “make efforts” to wear helmets while riding bicycles, further importance has been placed on education and awareness-building activities regarding the importance of head protection and the damage mitigation effects ^(Note 1) of wearing a riding helmet in traffic accidents to make wearing a helmet the norm for cyclists.

② Provision of bicycle paths

The police are promoting provision of special bicycle paths on roadways—for example, by developing traffic lanes exclusively for standard bicycles ^(Note 2), imposing regulations prohibiting parking within such zones in principle, and encouraging road administrators to provide bicycle paths ^(Note 3). Moreover, the police are also working to ensure greater safety through appropriate separation of cyclists and pedestrians—for example, by reviewing traffic regulations that allow standard bicycles, etc. to be ridden on sidewalks ^(Note 4).

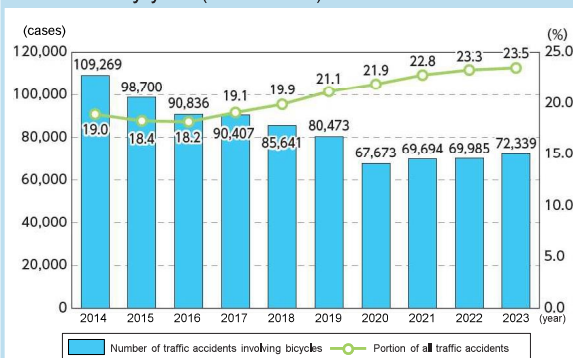
③ Warnings and crackdowns on traffic violations by bicycle users

Police hand a “warning slip” to bicycle users who have committed a violation, such as ignoring a traffic light or stop sign, mainly in priority areas and routes for bicycle guidance and awareness building ^(Note 5), in order to help people to develop a better understanding of the dangers of committing violations themselves and the importance of observing traffic rules,

while proactively arresting bicycle users who have committed heinous or dangerous violations, such as those causing specific dangers to other traffic participants.

Moreover, the police have been providing training to cyclists who have repeatedly committed specified violations that are considered to be at risk of causing traffic dangers, with the goal of preventing traffic dangers caused by cyclists. In 2023, 631 people attended this program ^(Note 6).

Chart II-1: Number of traffic accidents involving bicycles by year (2014-2023)



Note: “Traffic accidents involving bicycles” refers to accidents in which cyclists are parties of the first or second part. Accidents between cyclists are counted as a single case.



Bicycle simulator



Traffic lanes exclusive for standard bicycles

Chart II-2: Warnings and crackdowns on traffic violations by bicycle users (2023)

Ignoring traffic lights	Cutting through railroad crossing gates	Ignoring stop signs	Division of traffic	Drunk riding	Brake failures	Others	Crackdowns (cases)	Warnings (cases)
20,313	4,805	14,474	1,447	101	412	2,655	44,207	1,332,052

Note 1: The case fatality rate (the portion of casualties accounted for by death) among those not wearing riding helmets is about 1.9 times that of those wearing riding helmets (calculated based on the number of casualties from 2019 to 2023).

Note 2: Vehicle traffic lanes specified by traffic regulations for use by standard bicycles. In terms of total extension, the length of these lanes more than doubled between the end of FY2011 (257.3km) and the end of FY2021 (590.5km) (survey by the National Police Agency).

Note 3: Lanes exclusive to cyclists, separated with curb lines, fences, etc.

Note 4: According to the Road Traffic Act, bicycles and specified small motorized bicycles shall be ridden on roadways, in principle. Although traffic regulations may be implemented to allow standard bicycles and exceptional specified small motorized bicycles to be ridden on sidewalks by making use of road signs or markings, such traffic regulations that enable standard bicycles, etc. to be ridden on sidewalks are now being reviewed to comprehensively consider the passable widths of the sidewalks, traffic realities, and the surroundings, etc.

Note 5: In response to the occurrences of traffic accidents involving bicycles, and complaints, requests, etc. from residents, 1,963 locations in different parts of Japan have been specified (as of the end of March 2024; survey by the National Police Agency).

Note 6: The cumulative total as of January 9, 2024.

(3) Systemic revisions towards realization of orderly bicycle traffic

The National Police Agency hosted the “Expert Panel on Measures to Realize Orderly Bicycle Traffic,” which was made up of specialists with relevant knowledge and experience, industry stakeholders, and other experts, from August 2023 to January 2024, in response to recent changes in traffic accidents involving bicycles as well as warnings and crackdowns on violations of traffic rules by cyclists, etc. As a result, the Report on Measures to Realize Orderly Bicycle Traffic was compiled to set out the future direction of efforts to “provide enhanced safety education according to life stages,” “to promote warnings and crackdowns to improve the behavior of offenders” and “to provide an environment that ensures safe and secure cycling.” Given the circumstances of bicycle traffic order, the 213th Ordinary Session of the Diet in May 2024 adopted a bill to partially amend the Road Traffic Act.

The following describes the main amendments.

① Application of the traffic infraction notification procedure ^(Note 1) to traffic violations by cyclists

Unlike motor vehicles, etc. to which the traffic infraction notification procedure has always applied, it was pointed out that although all arrests for traffic violations by cyclists were subject to criminal proceedings without exception, in many cases cyclists were later exempted from prosecution, resulting in offenders getting away without facing adequate consequences. As the number of arrests for traffic violations by cyclists has increased, it was decided that the traffic infraction notification procedure should be applied to bicycles ^(Note 2) as well to enforce more effective sanctions ^(Note 3), while reducing the paperwork burden associated with criminal proceedings by processing them in a simpler, quicker manner. Cyclists aged 16 and over are subject to this procedure and relatively minor violations, such as ignoring a traffic light or stop sign, shall be deemed to be target violations so long as they are witnessed, indisputable, and typical, as is the case with motor vehicles.

However, heinous and dangerous violations, such as drunk cycling, shall not be classified as target violations and instead shall continue to be subject to criminal proceedings.

② Establishment of penalties to punish traffic violations by cyclists

Given the fact that traffic accidents stemming from the use of mobile phones, etc. while cycling have been rising and that the mortality and severe injury rates tend to be higher when cyclists are under the influence of alcohol ^(Note 4), the revised Road Traffic Act includes prohibitions that have been stipulated in Prefectural Public Safety Commission Rules ^(Note 5), such as a ban on mobile phone use while cycling, to impose stricter penalties on offenders who violate the rules, and stipulates that penalties should also be established to punish drunk cycling in the same way as drunk driving ^(Note 6).

Chart II-3: Establishment of penalties for mobile phone use, drunk driving/cycling, etc.

○ Mobile phone use, etc.		○ Drunk driving/cycling, etc.	
Vehicle type	Penalty	Vehicle type	Penalty
Motor vehicles Motorized bicycles	(Endangering traffic) Imprisonment of up to one year or a fine of up to 300,000 yen	Motor vehicles Motorized bicycles	Driver/Cyclist: Imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to 500,000 yen Provider of the vehicle: Imprisonment of up to three years or a fine of up to 500,000 yen Passenger: Imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of up to 300,000 yen Alcohol provider: Imprisonment of up to two years or a fine of up to 300,000 yen
Bicycles	Holding a mobile phone, etc. is subject to Traffic Infraction Notification Procedure. Imprisonment of up to six months or a fine of up to 100,000 yen	Bicycles	No penalty
Include prohibitions in the Road Traffic Act to impose stricter penalties		Establish new penalties to punish drunk cycling in the same way as drunk-driving	
Bicycles	Fine of up to 50,000 yen (depending on the Prefectural Public Safety Commission Rules)	Bicycles	No penalty

Note 1: A procedure that regards relatively minor violations committed by those operating vehicles, etc. that are witnessed, indisputable, and typical as target violations while retaining the penalties for violating the Road Traffic Act and has the Chief of Police give notice to offenders committing such violations (with some exceptions) to order them to pay penalties in a fixed amount. When they voluntarily pay such penalties, they shall be exempted from public prosecution for the incidents involving the relevant violations. When they do not pay their penalties within a certain period, they shall be subject to the original criminal proceedings. This procedure was established as a result of the 1967 amendment to the Road Traffic Act, reflecting the circumstances around 1965, when the number of prosecuted violations of the Road Traffic Act rapidly surged as motor vehicle traffic grew dramatically, and processing of these violations was placing an increasing burden on both the government and the general public in terms of time and energy spent, as all of these many offenders were subjected to criminal punishment, irrespective of the gravity of their violations, which may have led to reducing the impacts of such punishment.

2: Light road vehicles (excluding heavy towable vehicles) other than bicycles also became subject to the traffic infraction notification procedure.

3: To be put into force within two years of the date of publication (May 24, 2024).

4: The limit for cycling with alcohol in the body is 0.3mg of alcohol per ml of blood, or 0.15mg of alcohol per liter of breath.

5: The Road Traffic Act allows Prefectural Public Safety Commissions to establish their own rules which drivers must observe when such rules are deemed necessary to prevent road dangers and to ensure traffic safety, depending on road or traffic conditions.

6: To be put into force within six months of the date of publication.