



Multi-Lane Roundabouts Can Be Tricky

by Brian Benwick

While on a repeating club bicycle ride recently, in St Johns County, as our paceline approached a multi-lane roundabout off 16a, a vehicle had entered the circle and was within the inner lane of the circle before we arrived.

As our group of cyclists planned to take the first right exit of the roundabout, the leader proceeded into the roundabout without yielding/stopping, taking the outside lane. This appeared to have confused the motorist in the inside lane, who suddenly stopped mid-circle for safety's sake. No one fell or hit the vehicle, and no injuries or physical damage were incurred.

Had there been a crash, how would you have framed the incident? Who, if anyone, had the right-of-way? Would the motorist have been cited if not stopping for the cyclist(s), as we are vulnerable road users, or would the cyclist(s) be responsible for failing to yield to the vehicle that was the first party to enter the multi-lane roundabout? Did our paceline violate any traffic rules here? The multi-lane design has sparked a debate among the group that believes the "first-come, first-served" rule for single-lane roundabouts does not apply to multi-lane roundabouts.

But this assumed reasoning is incorrect. According to the Federal Highway Administration, cyclists and drivers must yield to traffic in ALL LANES, not just in the lane closest to them, or the one they are entering. See the third picture in the illustration below. Note, when on roads, cyclists must obey the same traffic rules that apply to motorists.

Common sense would indicate that you really can't predict if or when the motorist occupying the roundabout will need to switch lanes in front of you.

In general, roundabouts reduce traffic wait by 20% or more. They reduce potential conflicts from 32 to 8 at a light-signal intersection. And they are more efficient. Local ordinances on these types of circles can vary, but after checking our four surrounding counties, I found no changes to the Federal or FDOT standardized traffic rules in our biking area. Some roundabouts have sign and pavement-marking controls; others may not, but the following traffic rules generally apply in all cases.

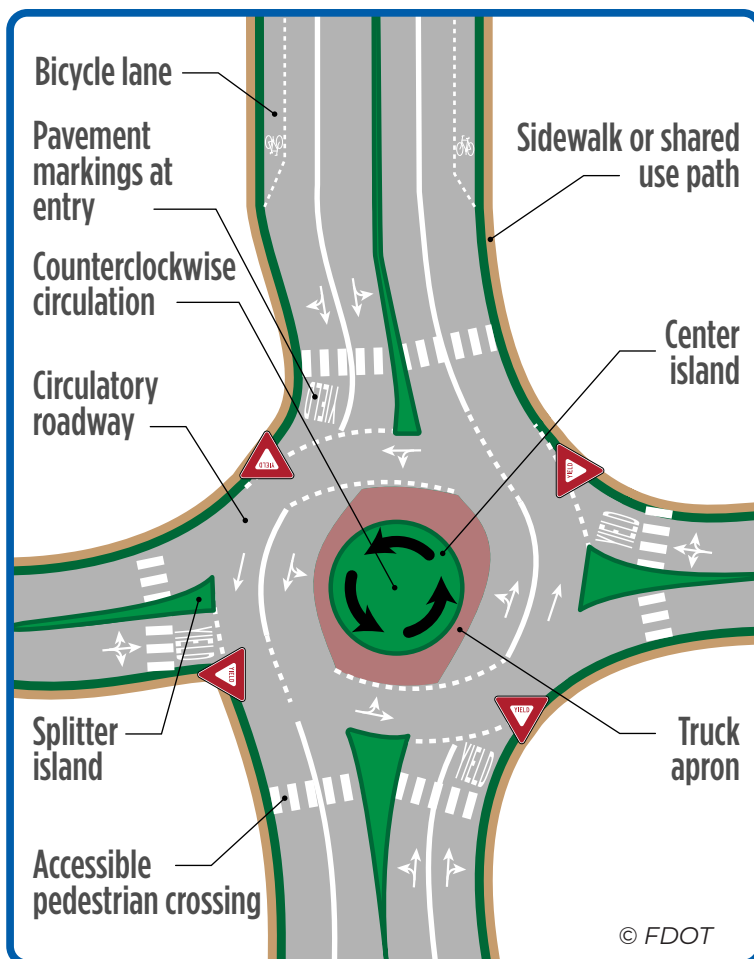
Cyclists and motorists are supposed to use signals before changing lanes inside the roundabout, aka traffic circle, rotary, or roundpoint, but we often forget to do so.

Still unsure about all of the roundabout traffic rules of behavior? Follow these guidelines:

1. Scope out the circle as you approach the roundabout yield signs, which can be mounted vertically, and/or painted in a stringed row of what looks like upside-down pennants. You should stop completely, especially if a motorist has already entered the circle from the nearest exit to your left. Remember, they have the right-of-way.
2. Enter the roundabout lane, which leads you to your intended and continued direction.
3. Stay in the outer lane if you plan to take the first exit in the circle.
4. Yield when in the presence of a truck. Let them pass you. They have large blind spots, and their mirrors often cannot see you. Avoid being side-swiped and wait for the larger vehicles to pass.

5. Change lanes where dashed lines begin or only when it is safe to do so, unless signs and/or pavement markings prohibit the behavior.
6. "Take the lane," aka control the lane prior to and while within the roundabout, positioning yourself in the left track of the outer lane when preparing to exit.
7. In extra-heavy traffic, especially during solo rides, consider dismounting and walking your bike across the pavement-marked centerline or crosswalks from the adjoining sidewalks. Motorists, as well as road cyclists, must always stop and yield to pedestrians, such as those walking their bikes.
8. Signal your intentions before changing lanes and when exiting the circle, if it is safe for you to do so, with only one arm available to steer and brake.
9. Yield to emergency vehicles entering the circle by pulling over at the far side of the next splitter island. Foot down.
10. Slow down to 10-20 mph when using a roundabout (posted speeds may vary). The old racing trick of speeding around corners should not be practiced in roundabouts.
11. Don't stop when negotiating the roundabout, if possible. And never back up. These circles are organically designed for continuous traffic flow. Always travel in a counterclockwise direction when in the United States.
12. Watch out for the right hook cut off as reaction times, distances, hand signals, and blinker duration are much shorter (if even existent) in roundabouts than on straight roads.
13. If you miss your exit due to heavy traffic, circle around again until you can safely exit.

I challenge you all to convert the above guidelines into muscle memory. You probably now know more than most about the inferred traffic rules of roundabout behavior, but don't let your fear of harassment of those who don't understand the tricks of roundabouts muddy your decision to be safe. Don't bet with your life.



Brian Benwick is an avid cyclist, a member of the North Florida Bike Club, and a traffic safety advocate. We hope you find this article helpful in navigating multi-lane roundabouts safely, whether biking or driving.

Here are additional Roundabout Resources:

- [Roundabout Guide](#)
- [Multi-lane-Roundabout-Handout.pdf](#)
- [FDOT: Roundabouts: Efficient, Innovative Intersections](#) (video for Drivers Education Courses)
- [FDOT: NAVIGATING A ROUNDABOUT](#)
- [FDOT: SAFETY IN A ROUNDABOUT](#)
- [FDOT Roundabouts: PEDESTRIANS & BIKES](#)
- [FDOT Roundabouts 101: EFFICIENCY](#)
- [FDOT Roundabouts 101: RIGHT OF WAY](#)
- [FDOT Roundabouts 101: TRUCK NAVIGATION](#)
- [Intersection Countermeasures](#)