

Becoming A Ride Leader

One of the key elements of the success of the VSBTC is the popularity of the Ride Schedule. Our diverse schedule keeps the Club vibrant, exciting, and encourages new riders to join. We always welcome new ride leaders to add new energy to our ride schedule. So why should you lead a ride?

- You get to choose the route, the pace and the stops. This means that you get to share your favorite routes and destinations, and ride at your preferred pace.
- You meet new people who share at least one of your interests.
- You can inspire people and get them excited about bicycling.
- You earn credit towards Valley Spokesmen club gear!

These guidelines are intended for one-day rides. You will need to gather additional information before leading a multi-day tour. Not all guidelines refer to every ride. You may need to adapt the guidelines to fit your particular route.

To have a ride listed in the newsletter, contact the ride coordinator, by phone, e-mail or in person at the club meeting and provide this information:

- Date of the ride
- Start time and location
- Distance
- Difficulty and pace
- Your name and telephone number
- If you are planning a lunch stop, indicate whether people should bring lunch or money to buy
- If the ride begins or ends in the dark, note that riders should bring lights
- If you are leading a ride that starts in a remote location, encourage carpooling

Commercial Activities

VS rides are non-commercial, so you can't sell anything on your ride. However, you may start a ride from your place of business, or choose a theme or optional activity related to your business.

Non-Valley Spokesmen Events

The ride calendar does not include rides that are sponsored by other organizations. Rides that are co-sponsored with other clubs will be included in the ride calendar.

What kind of ride do you want to lead?

Before you can select a route or make any of the other preparations necessary for a successful ride, you need to decide what kind of ride you want to lead. Here are some issues to consider:

- Decide with whom you want to ride.

- Decide on a pace, making sure it is one that you can very comfortably maintain for the duration of the ride.
- Decide on the distance. As with the pace, be sure that you can comfortably ride the entire distance.
- Decide on a difficulty. Tailor the pace to your ability and that of your probable partners.
- Think about what time the ride should start. If it's an after-work ride, keep in mind that most riders won't be able to make a start earlier than 6:00 pm. Consider, too, that a Saturday ride starting at 10:00 am may draw a larger crowd than a ride which starts earlier.
- Consider the season, particularly with respect to the weather and the amount of available daylight.
- It's perfectly alright to post your ride on the same day that another ride is posted, as long as your ride is in a different geographical area *or* is rated differently enough that it attracts a different type of rider than the first ride – e.g. one ride is rated 1L and the other is 3M. Offering rides of different types or in different areas provides variety and gives more people an opportunity to pedal with us on any given day. Variety is good.

Selecting a Route

General Considerations:

- You should pre-drive or –ride your route so you know everything about road conditions, mileage and water, lunch and restroom stops. If you have been on the route previously but not recently, you may want to go over it again to ensure that nothing has changed significantly. If you are using a route that you have never ridden before or that you are designing on your own, it's even more important that you travel it before the ride, preferably on your bike.
- Choose a starting point that people can find easily and that has ample parking. If possible, the start point should be near public restrooms.
- Consider the day, time and section before riding in-city trails, such as the Iron Horse. These trails aren't built for speed, and they aren't built for crowds.
- Wherever you go, remember to respect private property, and ride only in places where bicycles are legal.

Using an existing route

- The best choice for a route is one you have ridden and enjoyed. Ride leaders rarely mind if someone repeats one of their rides. Feel free to add your own variations. For inspiration, refer to the Route Library on the VS website.

Choosing a published route

- Your local bike shop likely carries books and maps of bike routes. If you photocopy a copyrighted map, include a note somewhere on the map that indicates the source and author. You should also include the ride rating.

Designing your own route

- Safety is the deciding factor for all route-related decisions. If you can't find a safe way to get somewhere, don't go there.
- Avoid intersections that are too close to a hill or curve, especially if the opposing traffic isn't required to stop.
- Avoid streets that are too narrow for cars to pass unless you will be traveling there for only a short distance.
- Avoid crossing busy streets, except at controlled intersections.
- Avoid heavily traveled, multi-lane roads whenever possible. If you find yourself with no good alternatives, try to avoid making left-hand turns on these types of roads.
- In general, avoid taking a group on sidewalks.
- Unless you are leading a mountain-bike ride, avoid difficult riding surfaces whenever possible. Rough or rutted roads, cobblestones, bridges with metal decks, railroad tracks, dirt, gravel, grass and stairs are difficult for most road bikes to negotiate.
- Try to avoid surprises. If you choose a route on which there is a steep uphill just after a turn, you should warn the riders in advance.

Map or Route Sheet?

In general, making a map or route sheet is a good idea, unless the route is short and simple. In all likelihood, some on your ride will have never been on some or the entire route and could easily get lost if they become separated from the group. Even if you lead a ride over the same route week after week, you should have a map or route sheet for new riders.

Choosing between a map and a route sheet is primarily a matter of personal preference. With a map, riders who miss a turn can find their way back to the route, assuming they haven't ridden off the map. On the other hand, the details of the map are more difficult to grasp while you are moving. It's easier to glance at a route sheet and see that the next turn is a right onto Holmes Rd. With a route sheet, you can also describe quirks of the route that won't be obvious from a map.

Making a map

- The simplest way to make a route map is to get a map of the area, photocopy the relevant portion, mark your route, and photocopy the marked copy. Here are a few suggestions:
- Try not to run the route right up the edge of the map.
- If you highlight the route with a highlighter, map details will show through when you make copies for the other riders.
- Include directional arrows, so riders know which way they are supposed to be riding.
- Mark the ride rating and total distance on the map.
- You might also want to augment a route sheet with a quick, hand-drawn map. You don't need to show every turn. Just include enough information to give riders a rough idea where you are headed.

Making a route (cue) sheet

A route sheet is a set of written instructions on how to follow a route. Each line of the route sheet includes the direction of the turn and the name of the road. You may also include incremental distance to the next turn, total distance to the turn and notes. You should also include:

- Starting point
- Clear instructions
- Mileage
- Restrooms, water fountains, regroup points. Possibly include bike shops and places for refreshments.
- Road hazards: point out blind curves, dangerous intersections, narrow roads, other similar potential problems
- Points of interest and landmarks
- Make the text big. Riders will be referring to the route sheet while moving and they should be able to read it very easily.
- Make the important stuff stand out
- Use standard abbreviations
- Lay out the route sheet for easy folding

Other Leader Guidelines and Responsibilities

In order to be a ride leader, you must be a VSBTC member in good standing. While you are not legally responsible for the health, safety and enjoyment of all participants, you should make every effort to ensure the ride is safe and successful.

When you are preparing your ride, you should assign an accurate rating to the ride, both in terms of terrain and pace. Once the ride starts, your pace should match the published pace.

Before the ride starts, you may want to appoint a sweep to ride in the rear to ensure no one is left behind or needs any help. You may also want to appoint a corner when several turns are made, again, to ensure no one is left behind.

As the leader, you should arrive at the start point at least 15 minutes prior to the published start time and ***start the ride on time***. You may decide to leave extra copies of the route sheet at the start for late arrivals. Once they catch up with the group, have them sign the roster.

If circumstances arise that prevent you from leading a ride, arrange for a substitute leader. Provide this person with the sign-in sheet, intended route and maps or cue sheets. If you cannot find a substitute leader, try to have someone go to the start point to cancel the ride. Post a message on the VS mailer stating that the ride is cancelled.

In the event of rain, post a message on the VS mailer as soon as possible. You may also wish to go to the start point in order to notify others who still may not have home Internet access.

Make sure you know who is riding. Know them by name. Introduce yourself to new riders. Explain the procedure for signing in. Give a general description of the ride. (You may want to have a briefing, which includes:

- Leader introduction
- Verification that all riders have signed the roster and have maps or cue sheets, if applicable
- Verification that all riders have a helmet
- Policy concerning leaving the route, or riding ahead of the leader
- Brief description of the route, to include:
 - Difficulty level
 - Regroup points, and lunch stop if applicable
 - Availability of food, water and restrooms
 - Critical turns and known hazards on the route
- Remind riders that they are responsible for their own safety
- Explain your policy for keeping track of riders. Identify sweep and/or corner

During the ride, make every reasonable effort to keep track of riders, counting at regroup spots. However, the riders are adults and can be assumed to be able to take care of themselves. Having said that, you should carry the ride roster with you. If a rider is injured or lost, you can contact the emergency number provided on the roster. If someone is injured, stay with that rider until help arrives, or until the rider can continue on his own. Enlist another rider to act as leader for the rest of the group.

If a rider has a mechanical problem, ensure that he can fix it or that he has another way to return to the start. Do not leave him behind unless he requests that you do so.

After the ride, mail the roster to the address listed on the form. NOTE: You must return the sheet ***EVEN IF YOUR RIDE IS CANCELLED***. The mileage keeper needs to know the status of every ride.

If you attend a ride scheduled by another leader who does not appear, you may lead the ride, provided you meet the above criteria.

The following is within the leader's sole discretion:

- To refuse a rider for unsafe equipment
- To refuse a rider considered unable to complete the ride
- To refuse a rider who requires unusual support
- To refuse a rider under 18 without a guardian
- To refuse a rider for any other reason which the leader deems unsafe

Occasionally, despite our best intentions, rides do not go smoothly. If this is due to a rider's poor behavior, there are options for mileage denial. The ride leader may deny a rider mileage:

- If basic ride rules are not observed.
- If a rider left the ride without informing the leader or another rider.
- If the rider's name and/or signature on the sign-in sheet is illegible.