

Crossings without signals

Some crossings have gates but no signals. At these crossings, stop, look both ways, listen and make sure that no train is approaching.

If there's a railway telephone you **MUST** contact the signal operator to make sure it's safe to cross.

Open the gates on both sides of the crossing and check again that no train is coming before crossing promptly.

Once you've cleared the crossing, close both gates and, if there's a telephone, inform the signal operator.

Always give way to trains – they can't stop easily.

See the Network Rail guide to using level crossings safely.



networkrail.co.uk/level-crossings

Incidents or breakdowns

If your vehicle breaks down, or you're involved in an incident on the crossing

- get everyone out of the vehicle and clear of the crossing
- if there's a railway telephone, use it **immediately** to inform the signal operator; follow any instructions you're given
- **if there's time** and if it's possible, move the vehicle clear of the crossing
- if the alarm sounds, or the amber light comes on, **get clear of the crossing at once – the train won't be able to stop.**

Crossings for trams

Look for traffic signs that show where trams cross the road.

Treat them in the same way as normal railway crossings.

REMEMBER, modern trams move quietly. Take extra care and look both ways before crossing.



Section seven

On the road

This section covers

- Awareness and anticipation
- Road positioning
- Bends
- Stopping distance
- Separation distance
- Overtaking
- Obstructions
- Pedestrian crossings
- Driving on hills
- Tunnels
- Trams or LRT systems

→ Awareness and anticipation

In any traffic situation there are some things that are obviously going to happen and some things that **might** happen.

To anticipate is to consider and prepare for something that will or might happen.

You can anticipate what might happen by making early use of the available information on the road.

Ask yourself

- What am I likely to find?
- What are other road users trying to do?
- Should I speed up or slow down?
- Do I need to stop?

Changing and difficult conditions

Traffic conditions change constantly and you need to

- check and recheck what's going on around you
- be alert all the time to changes in conditions, and think ahead.

How much you need to anticipate varies according to the conditions.

You'll find it more difficult to decide what might happen when

- the light is poor
- it's raining, snowy or foggy
- the traffic is heavy
- the route is unfamiliar.

Types of road

The type of road will also affect how much you can anticipate.

It's easier in light traffic to anticipate what other drivers might do. It's more difficult on a busy single carriageway, dual carriageway or motorway, where there are more possibilities to consider.

Driving ahead

Look well ahead to anticipate what might happen. You need to be alert and observant at all times.

Assess the movement of all other road users, including pedestrians, as far as you can see along the stretch of road on which you're travelling.

Take in as much as possible of the road

- ahead
- behind
- to each side.

You should

- observe the middle distance and far distance, as well as the area immediately in front of you
- glance frequently in the mirror to see what's happening in the area you've just passed
- scan the area in your view.

Observation

If you're a new driver, you'll tend to give most of your attention to controlling the vehicle.

Practise 'reading' the road (looking for important details). You don't have to be driving to do this; you can also do it as a passenger in a car or on a bus. Things to look for include

- other vehicles and pedestrians
- signals given by other drivers
- road signs and markings
- the type and condition of the road surface

- large vehicles, which sometimes need extra space to manoeuvre – for example, at roundabouts and other junctions
- movements of vehicles well ahead of you, as well as those immediately in front
- side roads or hills ahead
- buses signalling to move out from bus stops.

Clues

Look out for clues to help you act safely on what you see.

Watch for details in built-up areas where traffic conditions change rapidly. Be aware of the actions and reactions of other road users.

Reflections in shop windows can often give important information where vision is restricted or when you're reversing into a parking space.

A pedestrian approaching a zebra crossing might step out into the road sooner than you think.

Looking over, under and through parked vehicles may help you to see a pedestrian who is otherwise hidden from your view. This can enable you to anticipate and respond to the hazard in good time.



Take care approaching parked vehicles, especially if someone is in the driving seat.

Watch out for a driver stopping to set down or pick up a passenger. You may find they move off without warning, without checking in the mirrors or looking around.

When following a bus, watch for passengers standing up inside: the bus will probably stop shortly.

REMEMBER, try to anticipate the actions of other road users.



Be aware

How much you can see depends on how well you can see.

Your eyesight can change without you being aware of it. Have regular eyesight checks.

Your sense of hearing can also make you aware of what's happening around you. For example, if you're waiting to pull out at a junction and your view is restricted, you may hear an approaching vehicle before you can see it.

At works entrances and schools you should expect an increased number of pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. Watch for vehicles picking up and setting down at school start and finish times – buses as well as cars.



School buses will also be picking up and setting down passengers where there may not be normal bus stops.

Emergency vehicles

Look and listen for emergency vehicles. As well as the usual emergency services – police, fire and ambulance – others, such as coastguard, bomb disposal, mountain rescue and the blood transfusion service, may use blue flashing lights. Doctors attending emergencies may use green flashing lights.



HM Coastguard



Bomb disposal



Blood transfusion



Mountain rescue

You should try to keep out of the way of any emergency vehicle. Check where they're coming from: behind (using your mirrors), ahead or across your path.

Don't panic. Watch for the path of the emergency vehicle and take any reasonable – and legal – action possible to try to help it get through. They won't expect you to break the law; only to make a reasonable and safe attempt to help clear the way for them so that they can do the rest.

Look well ahead and choose a sensible place to pull into the side of the road, but don't endanger yourself or other road users or risk damage to your car.

Try to avoid stopping before the brow of a hill, a bend or a narrow section of road where the emergency vehicle may have difficulty getting through, and don't

- put yourself in a position where you would be breaking the law – for example, by crossing a red traffic light or using a bus lane during its hours of operation
- break the speed limit to get out of the way
- risk damaging your tyres, wheels or steering by driving up kerbs.

Emergency vehicles are normally travelling quickly and it's important to clear their path to allow them to do so. However, ambulances may need to travel slowly, even if they have blue lights flashing, when a patient is being treated inside. In this case, it's important for them to have a smooth ride, so don't drive in a manner that would cause the ambulance to brake or swerve sharply.

Watch the Blue Light Aware video to find out more about how to help emergency vehicles get through traffic.

motoringassist.com/bluelightaware



Driving in busy areas

When driving in busy areas, you should be especially alert to all possible hazards.

You should also be particularly aware of your speed and always drive at a speed appropriate to the conditions.

The speed limit is the absolute maximum and doesn't mean that it's always safe for you to drive at that speed. For example, in a narrow residential street with cars parked on either side, you'll need to drive more slowly than you would on a clear street that has the same speed limit.

Road positioning

You should normally keep to the left when driving in Great Britain.

However, keep clear of parked vehicles, so that you can respond safely to

- doors opening into the road
- pedestrians stepping out between vehicles
- children, who may be difficult to see and who might run into the road.

Don't

- drive too close to the kerb, particularly in streets crowded with pedestrians
- weave in and out between parked vehicles. It's unnecessary and confusing to other drivers.

When necessary, ease over to the left to let a faster vehicle overtake.

The correct position

You should always be in the correct position for the route you're going to take.

- Keep to the left if you're going straight ahead or turning left.
- Keep as close to the centre of the road as is safe when you're turning right.

Your position is important not only for safety, but also to allow the free flow of traffic. A badly positioned vehicle can hold up traffic in either direction.

One-way streets

Position your vehicle according to whether you intend to go ahead, turn left, or turn right.

- To turn left, keep to the left-hand lane.
- To turn right, keep to the right-hand lane, provided there are no obstructions or parked vehicles on the right-hand side of the road you're in.
- To go ahead, be guided by the road markings. If there's no specific lane for ahead, select the most appropriate lane, normally the left, in good time.



Before turning right, position your vehicle just to the left of the centre of the road.

Follow the road markings, get into the correct lane as soon as possible and stay in this lane. Watch for drivers making sudden lane changes without using the Mirrors – Signal – Manoeuvre (MSM) routine. Sometimes their positioning or hesitant driving is a clue that they're unsure of their route and may make a sudden decision to change lane.

Traffic in one-way streets often flows freely. Be aware that vehicles may pass on either side of you.

Lane discipline

You should always follow lane markings, which are there for two reasons.

- They make the best possible use of road space.
- They provide route directions for drivers.

Position yourself in good time

If you find you're in the wrong lane, don't try to change by cutting across other drivers. Carry on in your lane and find another way back to your route.



Changing lanes

Select the lane you need as soon as it's safe to do so. Always check your mirrors and, if necessary, take a quick sideways glance to be sure that you won't cause another road user to change course or speed. When it's safe to do so, signal in good time and, when clear, move out.

- Never weave from lane to lane.
- Never drive along straddling two lanes.
- Never change lanes at the last minute.
- Always stay in the middle of your lane until you need to change.

In heavy and slow-moving traffic

Don't

- change lanes suddenly or unnecessarily
- straddle lanes

- switch from lane to lane in an attempt to get through traffic more quickly
- obstruct 'keep clear' markings.

Allow for

- pedestrians crossing
- cyclists riding past on the left
- large vehicles needing to straddle lanes before turning
- motorcyclists filtering between lanes
- doors opening.

Driving ahead

Keep to the left-hand lane wherever possible. Don't use the right-hand lane just because you're travelling at speed.

On a carriageway with four or more lanes, peak-time 'tidal flow' systems might permit or forbid the use of some lanes on the right, depending on the time of day. Only use the lanes on the right when signs or markings allow you to do so.

Bus and cycle lanes

These are separate lanes shown by signs and road markings. Don't enter these lanes unless permitted by the signs.

You'll find more information on lane discipline in section 11, which covers driving on motorways.

Approaching a road junction

Look well ahead for signs and markings.

If you have two lanes in your direction and

- you intend to turn left, stay in the left-hand lane
- you intend to go straight ahead, stay in the left-hand lane unless otherwise indicated
- you intend to turn right, move to the right-hand lane in good time.

Don't try to gain an advantage by using an incorrect lane. Trying to change back to the proper lane at or near the junction can be dangerous.

If you have three lanes in your direction and you intend to

- turn left, stay in the left-hand lane
- go straight ahead, use the left-hand lane (unless there are left filter signs) or the middle lane, or be guided by road markings
- turn right, use the right-hand lane.



Slip road

Some junctions also have a slip road.

Get into the left-hand lane in good time before entering the slip road. You'll be able to slow down to turn left without holding up other traffic.

→ Bends

To deal effectively and safely with bends, you should look well ahead and try to assess accurately

- how severe the bend is
- the speed at which you need to be travelling to negotiate the bend under control.

Where vision is restricted, be prepared for

- oncoming vehicles
- obstructions such as broken-down or slow-moving vehicles
- pedestrians walking on your side of the road.

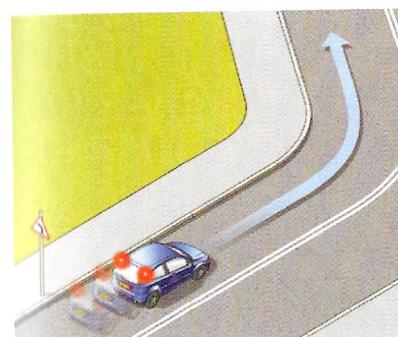
You should

- use the footbrake to control your speed on approach to the bend
- choose the right gear for the speed at which you're now driving
- use the accelerator carefully
- steer to hold the correct line through the bend.

REMEMBER, a bend can feel like a sharp corner if you approach it too fast, and you'll find it more difficult to keep your vehicle under control.



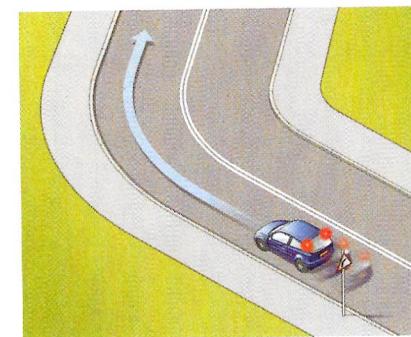
Positioning on bends



Left-hand bend

Keep to the centre of your lane as you approach.

Don't move to the centre of the road to improve your view round the bend. This could put you too close to oncoming traffic.



Right-hand bend

Keep to the left to improve your view of the road, but don't let a clear view tempt you to enter the bend at too high a speed.

Speed when approaching bends

Judging the correct road speed as you approach bends and corners takes practice and experience.

The correct speed is the one that allows you to drive your vehicle around the bend under full control.

That speed will depend on the

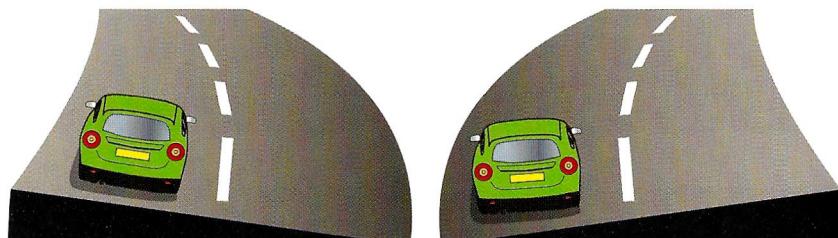
- type and condition of the road
- sharpness of the bend
- camber of the road
- visibility
- weather conditions.

Camber

The camber of a road is the angle at which the road normally slopes away from the centre to help drainage.

Adverse camber

Here the road slopes down towards the outside of the corner and the forces acting on your vehicle could cause it to leave the road more easily than on a normal corner.



Adverse camber can occur on left-hand and right-hand bends.

Banking

On a few bends, such as some motorway slip roads, the outward force may be partly counteracted by banking. This is where the road slopes up towards the outside of the bend.

Adjusting your speed going into a bend

Don't go into a bend too fast. If necessary, reduce speed before you enter the bend.

You can reduce your speed by taking your foot off the accelerator and

- allowing your speed to fall naturally, or by
- using the footbrake progressively and, if necessary, changing to a lower gear.

Your speed should be at its lowest before you begin to turn.

Braking on a bend

Try to avoid braking harshly on a bend. This can make your vehicle unstable.

The sharper the bend, the greater the effects of braking while cornering and the more likely the vehicle is to skid.

**Acceleration**

Don't confuse 'using the accelerator' with 'accelerating', which means going faster. When dealing with bends, 'using the accelerator' means using it just enough to drive the vehicle around the bend.

The correct speed at a corner or bend will depend on a number of things, including

- how sharp it is
- whether there are any static or moving hazards.

You'll have to judge

- the position you should be in
- the best speed for the corner or bend
- the gear most suitable for that speed.

Make sure that

- your speed is at its lowest before you start the turn
- you use the accelerator so that the engine is doing just enough work to drive the vehicle round the bend without going faster.

Too much acceleration can cause the wheels to lose their grip and skid, resulting in the vehicle swinging off course. This is particularly true on rear-wheel-drive vehicles.

Only increase your speed after you've straightened as you leave the bend.

Gears

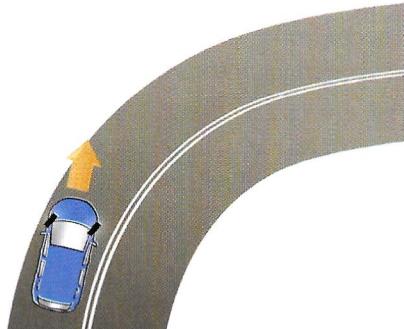
Make sure you select the correct gear before you enter the bend. You need both hands on the steering wheel as you're turning.

Steering

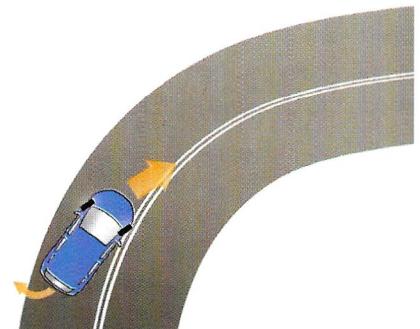
Every vehicle 'handles' differently. It's very important that you get to know how the vehicle you're driving behaves when you're steering round a bend.

Some vehicles 'understeer': they respond less than you would expect in relation to the amount of steering you use.

Others 'oversteer': they respond more than you would expect in relation to the amount of steering you use.



When a car understeers, the front tyres lose grip on the road. The car continues to travel in the same direction it was moving at the moment the tyres lost grip.



When a car oversteers, the rear tyres lose grip on the road and the rear of the car slides out. In severe cases this can lead to the car spinning and a serious loss of control.

To negotiate a bend, corner or junction safely, you must be able to judge how much steering to use.

Load

Any significant change in the centre of gravity of the vehicle or the weight it's carrying will affect its handling on bends, compared with when it's lightly loaded.

This change may be caused by

- extra passengers
- heavy objects in the boot
- objects on the roof rack.

Tyre pressures

Incorrect tyre pressures can also affect steering. Low pressure and excess pressure can both affect road holding and tyre wear.

Low pressure produces a heavier feel and in severe cases can cause the tyres to overheat.

Excess pressure can affect road holding on bends and increases the risk of skidding.



Negotiating the bend

Look ahead

Look well ahead for any indications, such as road signs, warnings and road markings, which will tell you

- the type of bend
- the direction the road takes
- how sharp the bend is
- whether the bend is one of a series.

Assess the situation

Ask yourself

- How dangerous does it seem? Remember, if the word 'slow' is painted on the road, that means there's a hazard and you need to respond to it safely.
- What if there's an obstruction on the bend, such as a slow-moving or parked vehicle?
- Are there likely to be pedestrians on your side of the road? Is there a footpath?
- Is there an adverse camber? Remember that on a right-hand bend an adverse camber could make your vehicle veer to the left.

Always drive so you can stop safely within the limit of your vision. Where your view is restricted, adjust your speed accordingly.

Approach with care

As you approach, follow the Mirrors – Signal – Manoeuvre (MSM)/Position – Speed – Look (PSL) routine. Before you reach the bend

- take up the best position for the type of bend
- adjust your speed, if necessary, and select the most suitable gear.

Entering the bend

As you enter the bend, press the accelerator just enough to keep

- the wheels gripping
- the vehicle under full control.

After you begin to turn

Avoid heavy braking, except in an emergency.

Stopping on a bend

Avoid stopping on a bend, except in an emergency.

If you have to stop, do so where following traffic can see you. This is especially important on left-hand bends, where vision can be more limited.

If you can, stop clear of a continuous centre line and give clear warning of any obstruction to other traffic. Use hazard warning lights and, if you have one, an advance warning triangle (or any other permitted warning device); see section 15.

At night

On unfamiliar roads, the lights of oncoming traffic may help you to plan ahead. However, negotiating bends at night has its own hazards.

- Anticipate hazards around the bend.
- Be prepared to be affected by the lights of oncoming traffic, especially on right-hand bends. Don't be taken by surprise.
- Dip your headlights in advance for oncoming traffic approaching the bend, especially on left-hand bends.

For more information on cornering techniques and bend analysis, advanced drivers may wish to refer to the TSO/Police Foundation publication **Roadcraft**.



A series of bends

Double and multiple bends are almost always signed. Take note of

- road signs
- double white lines
- arrows directing you to move to the left.

For example, if the second bend follows closely after the first and you haven't taken notice of the road sign or markings, you could find yourself speeding up when you should be slowing down.

On a winding road, selecting the appropriate gear will help you to

- drive at a safe speed
- keep the right amount of load on the engine and the right amount of grip on the road.

Where there's a series of bends, they often turn in alternate directions. As soon as you've negotiated one, you have to prepare for the next. Look well ahead for changes in the camber of the road, which could affect your control.

Braking distance

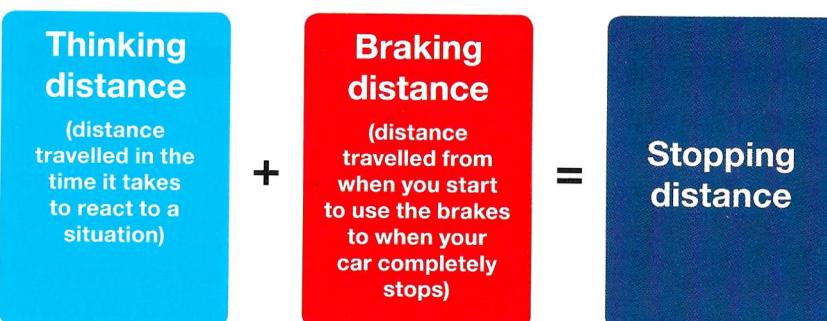
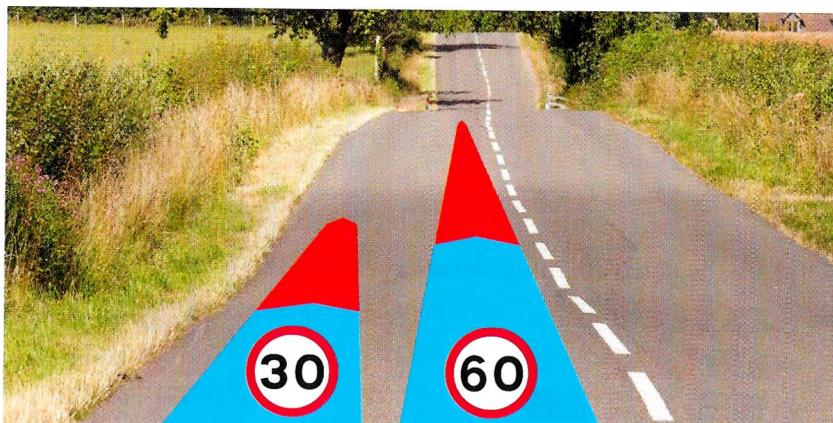
This depends mainly on the speed of your vehicle, although other factors can also play a part.

Allow double the normal stopping distance on wet roads and 10 times the normal distance when the roads are icy.

Your tyres will have less grip on the road where

- the road surface is loose
- any diesel is spilt on the road.

In these conditions, you'll need more time and room to stop the vehicle.



Separation distance

Road traffic incidents can be caused by drivers getting too close to the vehicle in front.

It's essential that every driver is able to judge a safe separation distance in all road, traffic and weather conditions.

How far should you keep from the vehicle in front? Ideally, you should be no closer than the overall stopping distance that corresponds to your speed.

In heavy, slow-moving urban traffic that might not be realistic, as you could be wasting valuable road space. However, even then, the gap should never be less than your thinking distance – and much more if the road is wet and slippery.

A reasonable rule to apply in good, dry conditions is a gap of one metre for each mph of your speed. For example, at 55 mph (88 km/h) a gap of 55 metres would be appropriate. In bad conditions, leave at least double the distance.

A useful technique for judging one metre per mph is to use the 'two-second rule'.

REMEMBER, your overall stopping distance is the only really safe gap and anything less is taking a risk.



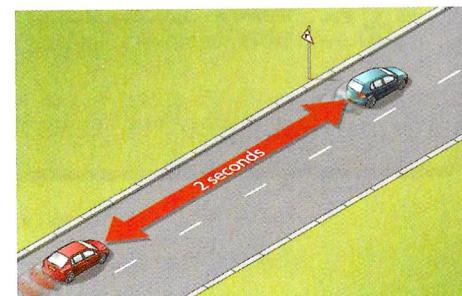
The two-second rule

In good, dry conditions, an alert driver, who's driving a vehicle with good tyres and brakes, needs to be at least two seconds behind the vehicle in front.

In bad conditions, double the safety gap to four seconds or even more.

How to measure

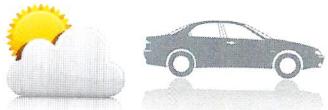
Choose an obvious stationary point ahead, such as a bridge, a tree or a road sign.





When the vehicle ahead passes the object, say to yourself, 'Only a fool breaks the two-second rule.' If you reach the object before you finish saying it, you're too close to the vehicle in front and need to drop back.

Driving too close to the vehicle in front is a major factor in crashes. You can avoid such incidents by looking well ahead, keeping your distance and giving yourself time to react.



2 secs

In good, dry conditions, leave a two-second gap.



4 secs

Double the distance

In wet weather, leave a four-second gap.



20 secs

10 times the distance

In icy weather, leave a 20-second gap.

When a vehicle behind is driving too close to you, ease off the accelerator very gradually and increase the gap between you and the vehicle in front. This will give you more time to react if the driver ahead should slow down or stop suddenly.

→ Overtaking

Overtaking can be a risky manoeuvre, as it can put you on a collision course with approaching traffic.

Overtaking at the wrong time or in the wrong place is extremely dangerous. It's vital to choose your time and place carefully.

Before overtaking you must be certain you can return to your side of the road safely without getting in the way of

- vehicles coming towards you
- vehicles you're overtaking.

Overtaking a moving vehicle

Don't overtake unless it's necessary. For example, don't rush to get past someone only to turn off that road shortly afterwards. Ask yourself whether it's really necessary. If you decide it is, you need to find a suitable place.

You **MUST NOT** overtake where to do so would cause you to break the law. Details are shown in The Highway Code.

In addition, some places are never suitable. For example, **don't** overtake

- if your view ahead is blocked
- if there's too little room
- if the road narrows
- if you're approaching a bend or junction
- if there's 'dead ground' – a dip in the road which might hide an oncoming vehicle.

Judging speed and distance

The speed of the vehicle you're overtaking is very important. When you're closing up behind a moving vehicle, it will cover quite a distance before you can actually pass it – probably much more than you think.

It could take you quite a long time to overtake. For example, if you're doing 30 mph (48 km/h), it could take a quarter of a mile (400 metres) just to catch up with a vehicle 200 yards (180 metres) ahead that's travelling at as little as 15 mph (24 km/h).

On the other hand, if you're travelling at 55 mph (88.5 km/h) and an oncoming vehicle is doing the same, both vehicles are actually approaching each other at 110 mph (177 km/h) or 50 metres per second.

Overtaking takes time. The smaller the difference between your speed and the speed of the vehicle you're overtaking, the longer the stretch of clear road you'll need.

Overtaking large vehicles

If you're considering overtaking a large vehicle, you need to keep well back to ensure that you

- get the best view of the road ahead
- allow the driver to see you in their mirrors. Remember, if you can't see their mirrors, they can't see you. Be especially aware that left-hand-drive lorries have different blind spots from right-hand-drive vehicles.

Leave a good space while waiting to overtake. If another car fills the gap, drop back again.

If possible, you should also note whether the vehicle you intend to overtake is loaded or unloaded. The speed of large vehicles varies greatly when they're going up and down hills. A loaded vehicle might crawl slowly uphill and then pick up speed surprisingly quickly on the downhill run.

Always remember these possible changes in speed when you're thinking of overtaking. Avoid driving alongside a large vehicle; you may be in its blind spot and the driver may not be able to see you.



Overtaking slow-moving vehicles

There are several types of slow-moving vehicle that you may encounter on the roads. These include farm machinery, tractors, roadworks vehicles and refuse collection vehicles. Most will have flashing amber beacons.

Tractors and farm machinery will often pull in to the left when it's safe, or if there's space to do so, to let a queue of traffic pass. However, they're not always able to do so.

Travelling behind a slow-moving vehicle can be frustrating, but be patient. Wait until the road ahead is completely clear of oncoming traffic and you're sure it's both safe and legal to overtake. Remember also that there may be workers in the road – for example, around roadworks vehicles or refuse collection trucks.

Don't overtake on the approach to bends, before the brow of a hill or where there are dips in the road ahead which could hide an oncoming vehicle. In rural areas, there may also be hidden entrances to farm properties from which vehicles may suddenly emerge.

Only overtake if your view of the road ahead is completely clear and unobstructed, and you're sure there's no oncoming traffic. Also check behind, to make sure no other vehicle is trying to overtake at the same time.

Leave plenty of room when overtaking and allow plenty of time for your manoeuvre. Some vehicles, especially those towing farm machinery, may be wider or longer than expected.

Overtaking on a hill

Uphill

Give yourself time and room to return to your side of the road well before the brow of the hill. Your zone of vision will get shorter as you approach the brow of the hill. Don't forget that oncoming vehicles will be travelling downhill and could be approaching very quickly.

Downhill

It's more difficult to slow down when going downhill. If you overtake going downhill, you may find yourself travelling faster than you intended. Be careful not to lose control of your vehicle.

Overtaking on long hills

On some long hills, double white lines divide the road so that there are two lanes for traffic going uphill, but only one downhill.

If the line is broken on the downhill side, this means you can overtake going downhill if it's safe to do so.

Overtaking on three-lane roads

Some roads are divided into three lanes, where the middle lane can be used for overtaking in either direction. These roads can be particularly dangerous. Before overtaking, you must make sure the road is clear far enough ahead. If in doubt, **wait**.

Some three-lane roads have double white lines marked on the road to allow vehicles travelling uphill to overtake.

Before overtaking

Many danger spots are marked with double white lines along the road. Look out for arrows directing you to move over to the left as you're approaching these areas.

Junction signs and hatch markings in the middle of the road alert you to the possibility of turning traffic. Don't overtake as you approach a junction, and look for traffic

- waiting to turn right
- slowing to turn left
- crossing your path
- queuing.

Watch the vehicle in front

Before overtaking, decide what the driver in front is likely to do by watching both them and the road ahead for a while. They might

- decide to overtake
- continue to drive at the speed of the vehicle ahead of them
- intend to turn off soon
- have seen something ahead which you haven't.

Vehicles turning right

Research has shown that most overtaking incidents are caused by the overtaking driver hitting a vehicle that's turning right. To avoid this type of collision you should

- check the indicators of the vehicle you're about to overtake
- assume that a vehicle that's slowing down is about to turn.



Following through

Never automatically follow an overtaking vehicle without being able to see for yourself that the way is clear. The vehicle in front obscures your view and hides you from the view of oncoming traffic.

Always make your own decisions about overtaking, based not only on what you see but also on what **you** know.

Be patient. If in doubt, hold back. There might not be enough time for both of you to overtake at once.

Steps to overtaking

To overtake, you might have to use some or all of these steps several times before the right moment arrives. For example, if someone overtakes you just as you're about to overtake, you'll need to start all over again.

Use the MSM/PSL routine

M – Mirrors

Check your mirrors to assess the situation behind and look well ahead.

S – Signal

Give a signal if it will help

- drivers behind
- the driver you're overtaking
- drivers coming towards you.

M – Manoeuvre

Use the PSL routine

P – Position

Be near enough to the vehicle ahead to overtake smoothly when you're ready, but not so close that you can't get a good view of the road ahead.

S – Speed

Be fast enough to keep up with the vehicle in front and with enough reserve power to pass it briskly.

You might need to change down to get extra acceleration when you're ready to start overtaking.

L – Look

Assess the whole situation

- the state of the road
- what the driver ahead is doing or might be about to do
- any hazards
- the speed and position of oncoming vehicles
- the speed difference between you and oncoming vehicles.

Make a final check in front and behind. Check especially for motorcyclists as they may be approaching quickly and could have been hidden from view previously. Be aware of, and check, any blind spots by taking a quick sideways glance if necessary before deciding to pull out to overtake. If it's safe, steer out gradually, then

- overtake as quickly as you can
- steer gradually back to the left and avoid cutting in.

Never begin to overtake if another vehicle is overtaking you or is about to do so. Overtake only when you're sure it's safe to do so.

Allow plenty of room

When overtaking cyclists, motorcyclists or horse riders, give them plenty of room – move out as far as you would if you were overtaking a car. Never attempt to overtake them just before you turn left or if you would have to stop or slow down soon after.



If they look over their shoulder it could mean that they intend to pull out, turn right or change direction, so give them time and space to do this.

Overtaking on the left

You should never overtake on the left unless

- the vehicle in front is signalling to turn right, and you can safely overtake on their left. Take care if there's a road to the left; oncoming traffic turning right into it may be hidden by the vehicle you're overtaking
- traffic is moving slowly in queues, and vehicles in the lane on your right are moving more slowly than you are.

Passing on the left

In addition, you can go past on the inside of slower traffic when

- you're in a one-way street (but not a dual carriageway) where vehicles are allowed to pass on either side
- you're in the correct lane to turn left at a junction.

Overtaking on dual carriageways

Overtake only if you're sure you can do so safely.

You should normally stay in the left-hand lane and only use the right-hand lane for overtaking or turning right. If you use the right-hand lane for overtaking, you should move back to the left-hand lane as soon as it's safe to do so.



Plan well ahead and use the appropriate parts of the MSM/PSL routine.

For example

M – Mirrors

Use your mirrors to assess the speed and position of following traffic. On a high-speed dual carriageway, start the checks in plenty of time.

S – Signal

Give a signal if it will help the driver you're overtaking and other drivers further ahead. Be aware that on a dual carriageway, a vehicle in the right-hand lane signalling right may be slowing to turn right through the central reservation.

P – Position

Keep well back from the vehicle you're going to overtake to give you a good view of the road ahead.

S – Speed

Make sure you have enough speed in reserve to overtake briskly without breaking any speed limits.

L – Look

Look ahead and assess

- the condition of the road
- what the vehicle ahead is doing
- any hazards.

Check behind again to reassess the situation; check especially for motorcyclists as they can approach very quickly. Don't begin to overtake if another vehicle is about to overtake you.

If it's safe, change lanes by steering gradually across to the right-hand lane and overtake briskly. Make sure you're well clear of the vehicle you've overtaken before moving back to the left. Don't cut in.

Overtaking on the left

You mustn't overtake on the left unless traffic is moving slowly in queues, and the queue on your right is moving more slowly than you are.

Never move to a lane on your left to overtake.

Defensive driving

Never accelerate when someone is overtaking you. If necessary, ease off to help them pass you.

REMEMBER, if in doubt, don't overtake. Overtaking often takes longer than you think, especially if you're overtaking a large vehicle.



Keep well back from any vehicle that's too close to the vehicle in front and swinging in and out. Be patient, in case they do something hasty.

Be considerate. Don't block faster vehicles that might want to overtake you, even if they're breaking the speed limit.

Obstructions

The way to deal with any obstruction is to look and plan well ahead, and to use the MSM/PSL routine.

The decision to wait or to go around the obstruction will depend on

- the type and width of the road
- whether the obstruction is on
 - your side of the road
 - the other side of the road
 - both sides of the road
- whether there's approaching traffic
- the behaviour of following drivers
- the room available.



As a general rule, if the obstruction is on your side of the road, approaching traffic will have priority.

Don't assume that you have priority if the obstruction is on the other side of the road. Always be prepared to give way and remember that the obstruction could conceal something such as a pedestrian.

Driving around an obstruction

Look well ahead to identify the obstruction in good time before using the routine.

M – Check your mirrors to assess the speed and position of following traffic.

S – Signal if necessary.

P – Decide on your position. Avoid keeping so far to the left that you have to steer past the obstruction at the last minute; a gradual change of course is required. If you have to stop and wait, keep well back from the obstruction in a position that allows you to see ahead clearly without blocking the approaching traffic.

S – Adjust your speed as necessary. This will depend on the situation, but aim to regulate your speed so that you can steer a steady course.

L – Finally, look and assess the situation before you decide whether it's

- necessary to wait
- safe to proceed.

Obstructions on hills

These need special care. Give yourself the time and space you need, remembering that you may need to brake earlier than normal.

If you're travelling downhill and the obstruction is on the other side of the road, don't take your priority for granted. If it's safe, be prepared to give way to traffic coming uphill, especially heavy vehicles. Your consideration will be appreciated.

Roadworks

These areas make the usable width of the road much narrower. They can be controlled either by temporary traffic lights or by workers with 'stop/go' boards.

Obey all lights and signs, slow down and look out for workers who may be walking on or near the road.

More information on negotiating roadworks areas and contraflow systems can be found in section 11.

Large, slow-moving vehicles

These vehicles include

- machines working along the verge, such as mowers or hedge cutters
- agricultural vehicles
- vintage vehicles
- plant and machinery used for road maintenance
- escorted wide, long or heavy loads
- refuse collection vehicles.

You may see a temporary sign alerting you to slow vehicles operating in the area. There may also be clues, such as bins awaiting collection, freshly cut grass or hedge cuttings in the road. If you come across a large, slow vehicle, be patient and hold back so that you have a good view past it. If you're in a queue and the vehicle in front overtakes, don't blindly follow it. Look out for workmen in the road and only pass when you can see it's safe to do so.

Drive so that you can respond safely should you unexpectedly come across a large, slow vehicle. Remember – the drivers of these vehicles can't move out of the way quickly.



Defensive driving

Don't follow through behind the vehicle in front without being able to see for yourself that the way ahead is clear.

Keep a safe distance from the obstruction and the approaching traffic. Where space is limited, reduce your speed and take extra care. The smaller the gap, the lower your speed needs to be.

→ Pedestrian crossings

The driver and pedestrian crossings

People on foot have certain rights of way at pedestrian crossings.

Some rules and advice apply to all types of crossing.

- You **MUST NOT** park
 - on a crossing; this blocks the way for pedestrians
 - within the area marked by zigzag lines; this obstructs both the pedestrian's view of approaching vehicles and an approaching driver's view of the crossing.
- You **MUST NOT** overtake
 - the moving vehicle nearest to a crossing
 - the leading vehicle that has stopped to give way to a pedestrian.
- Even if there are no zigzag lines, never overtake just before a crossing.
- Give yourself more time to stop if the road is wet or icy.
- Keep crossings clear when queuing in traffic, stopping before the crossing if you can see that you won't be able to clear it.
- You should take extra care where the view of either side of a crossing is blocked by queuing traffic. Pedestrians may be crossing between these vehicles, incorrectly thinking they've stopped to allow pedestrians to cross.

- Always allow pedestrians plenty of time to cross, especially if they're older or disabled, and don't try to hurry them by revving your engine or edging forward.
- Watch out for pedestrians who try to rush across at the last minute.

Also, on all signal-controlled crossings you should

- give way to anyone still on the crossing even if the signal for vehicles has changed to green
- proceed with extreme caution if the signals aren't working.

There are additional rules for different types of crossing.

Zebra crossings

Zebra crossings have flashing yellow beacons on both sides of the road and black and white stripes on the crossing. They also have white zigzag markings on both sides of the crossing and a 'give way' line about a metre from the crossing, which marks the place for drivers to stop when necessary. When pedestrians are waiting to cross at a zebra crossing, check your mirrors and stop if you can do so safely.

Be aware also of pedestrians approaching the crossing. They may suddenly start to move onto the crossing, so be ready to stop for them.

You **MUST** give way to anyone who

- is already crossing
- has stepped onto the crossing.

Don't wave people across. There could be another vehicle coming in the other direction and you can't be sure what other drivers might do.

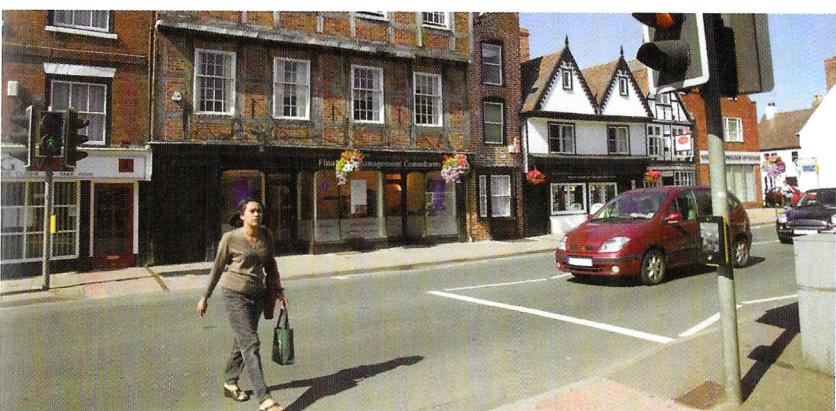
REMEMBER, some zebra crossings are divided by a central island. Each half is a separate crossing.



Pelican crossings

These are light-controlled crossings where the pedestrian uses push-button controls to control the lights. They have no red-and-amber phase before the green light. Instead, they have a flashing amber light, which means you must give way to pedestrians on the crossing but may drive across if the crossing is clear.

The crossing area is shown by studs and a 'stop' line marks the place for drivers to stop when it's necessary.



Pelican crossings may be

- **straight**

A pelican crossing that goes straight across the road is one crossing, even if there's a central refuge. You must wait for people coming from the other side of the refuge.

- **staggered**

If the crossings on each side of the central refuge aren't in line, the crossings are separate.

Puffin crossings

These are user-friendly, ‘intelligent’ crossings where electronic devices automatically detect when pedestrians are on the crossing and delay the green light until the pedestrians have reached a position of safety.

Unnecessary delays in traffic flow are reduced by these devices.

- If the pedestrians cross quickly, the pedestrian phase is shortened.
- If the pedestrians have crossed the road before the phase starts, it will automatically be cancelled.

The light sequence at these crossings is the same as at traffic lights (see section 6).



Toucan crossings

These are shared by pedestrians and cyclists. Cyclists are permitted to cycle across.

The light sequence at these crossings is the same as at traffic lights.



Equestrian crossings

These are for horse riders and may be alongside those for pedestrians and cyclists. They have wider crossing areas, pavement barriers and either one or two sets of controls, one being set at a higher position.

School-crossing patrols

Watch out for these patrols and obey their signals.

At particularly dangerous locations, two amber lights flashing alternately give advance warning of the crossing point.

Don't overtake when you're approaching a school crossing. Always keep your speed down so you're ready to slow down or stop if necessary.



Defensive driving

Always look well ahead to identify pedestrian crossings early. Look for the flashing yellow beacons, traffic lights, zigzag markings, etc.

Use the MSM routine and keep your speed down.

Brake lights can't be seen by the pedestrians at the crossing or by approaching drivers, so if you're the leading vehicle you should consider using an arm signal when slowing down or stopping at a zebra crossing.

Driving on hills

You need to understand how driving uphill and downhill can affect your control of the vehicle.

- Going uphill, your engine has to use more power to overcome gravity and drive the vehicle up the hill.
- Going downhill, gravity will cause the vehicle to increase speed. The steeper the hill, the greater this effect.

In each case, the effect on the controls is different from driving on the level.

Going uphill

When going uphill

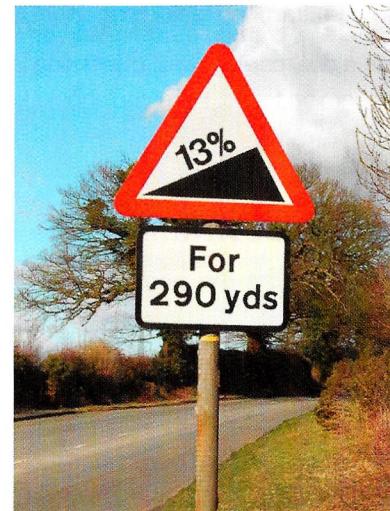
- you'll find it more difficult to maintain or increase speed. The engine has to work harder to make the vehicle go faster
- your brakes will slow the vehicle down more quickly
- you might need to change to a lower gear to maintain your speed. If you release the accelerator or push the clutch pedal down, your speed will drop more quickly than it would on the level. Changing to a lower gear should be done without hesitation, so you don't lose too much speed
- remember to apply the parking brake before you release the footbrake when stopped, otherwise you might roll back.

Look for signs

On steeper hills, you'll see warning signs telling you how steep the upward slope is. The figures usually measure the gradient in percentage terms (or very occasionally as a ratio); the higher the percentage, the steeper the hill.

You may see another rectangular sign telling you the length of the hill and further information.

Watch out for slow-moving, heavy vehicles. They may be travelling much more slowly than other traffic and their large size can make them difficult to overtake safely.



Assess the hill

If the hill is very steep, think ahead and consider changing to a lower gear. If you do need to change gear, make sure you do so in good time.

Don't stay in a high gear to try to keep your speed up. Your vehicle will climb better in a lower gear.

Turning and climbing at the same time is hard work for the engine. If the road bends sharply, you'll find it safer and easier on the engine to change down before the bend.



Separation distance

Keep well back from the vehicle ahead.

- If you don't hold back and the vehicle ahead suddenly slows or stops, you may have to brake harshly.
- Holding back may enable you to keep going gently while the vehicle ahead regains speed. This is safer and can also help to avoid congestion.

Overtaking

It's usually more difficult to overtake when travelling uphill. Oncoming traffic may be travelling faster than usual and may take longer to slow down or stop.

On a dual carriageway, overtaking is easier because there's no danger from oncoming traffic. Here you should keep a lookout for others following behind you who can overtake with ease. Don't block their progress.

Going downhill

When going downhill

- you'll find it more difficult to slow down and the brakes will have less effect
- it's harder for the engine to hold the vehicle back. In higher gears it won't do so at all
- you should avoid coasting, either out of gear or with the clutch pedal down, because you'll have no engine braking. Without engine braking your vehicle will pick up speed more easily, and this could result in you having less control of the vehicle
- try to avoid braking on a bend
- get into a lower gear in good time, particularly if there's a bend ahead. This will increase the engine braking and help to control the vehicle's speed
- use the correct combination of lower gear and careful use of the footbrake to keep control of your speed.

Look for signs

The steep hill (downwards) warning sign will give you the gradient of the downward slope.

You might also see a rectangular sign advising use of a low gear. The steeper the hill, the lower the gear.

Assess the hill

Use the sign to help you think ahead. If the route is unfamiliar, or a bend limits your view of the road, change down before you begin to descend. Change smoothly and without hesitation.

Separation distance

Always keep the correct separation distance from the vehicle ahead.

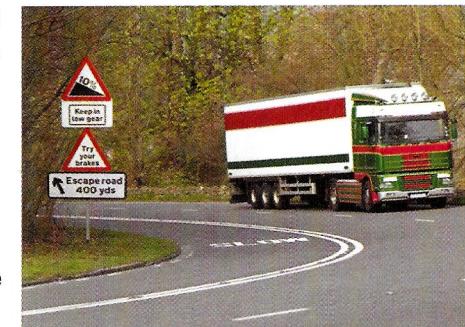
If you don't hold back and the vehicle ahead suddenly slows down or stops, you'll have to brake very hard. The driver behind will get very little warning.

If you hold back, you'll have time to reduce your speed more gradually.

Adjust your speed

On steep hills, you'll normally need to reduce speed. Change down to a lower gear to give yourself more braking power and control.

By selecting a lower gear, you should be able to avoid using your brakes too much. Excessive braking on hills can result in 'brake fade' and loss of control. Brake fade is a loss of braking power caused by the heat generated by continuous use of the brakes.



Look for 'escape lanes', which are designed to stop runaway vehicles.

Overtaking

It's only safe to overtake downhill where

- there are no bends or junctions
- your view of the road ahead is clear.

You should be absolutely **certain** that you can overtake without causing oncoming traffic to slow down or change course.

Remember that the vehicle you're overtaking may build up speed, and you'll find it more difficult to slow down for oncoming traffic. They'll find it more difficult to get out of your way.

Look out for road markings, especially continuous white lines along the centre of the road.

Hills in towns

Take particular care in towns, where pedestrians may be crossing at junctions on hills.

Traffic speeds are generally lower and vehicles closer together. As a result, your view will often be reduced.

Pay attention to your distance from the vehicle ahead.

You'll find traffic lights, school-crossing patrols and pedestrian crossings are sometimes situated on a hill. Where this is the case, it adds to the importance of

- using your mirrors
- leaving a suitable gap when you stop
- using your parking brake effectively
- making sure you're in the right gear for the situation.

You'll be doing these things in towns already, but on hills they have additional importance.



Tunnels

When approaching a tunnel

- switch on your dipped headlights
- don't wear sunglasses
- observe the road signs and signals
- keep an appropriate distance from the vehicle in front.

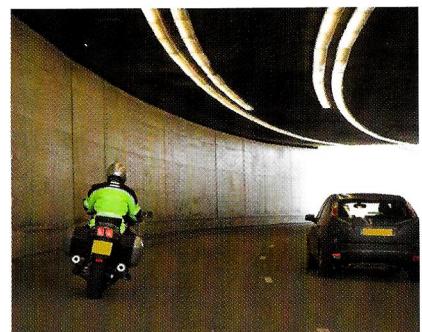
Many tunnels, particularly the longer ones in Europe, are equipped with radio transmitters so that drivers can be warned of any incidents, congestion or roadworks. If this applies to the tunnel you're approaching, switch on your radio and tune in to the indicated frequency.

When entering a tunnel, your visibility will be suddenly reduced. Be prepared for this change in conditions and make sure that you can stop within the distance you can see to be clear. Increase the distance between you and the car in front if necessary.

If the tunnel is congested

- switch on your warning lights
- keep your distance, even if you're moving slowly. If you have to stop, leave at least a five-metre gap between you and the vehicle in front
- if possible, listen out for messages on the radio
- follow any instructions given by tunnel officials or variable message signs.

For action to take in the event of a breakdown or incident, see section 16.



→ Trams or LRT systems

Light rapid transit (LRT) systems, or 'metros', are being introduced in many large towns and cities to provide a more efficient and environmentally friendly form of public transport.

Tram systems are common throughout Europe and there are plans to introduce them to more cities in the UK.

Trams may operate completely separately from other traffic or they may run on roads open to other traffic. As they run on rails, they're fixed in the route they follow and can't manoeuvre around other road users. The vehicles may run singly or as multiple units, and may be up to 60 metres (about 200 feet) long. Remember that trams are quiet, move quickly and can't steer to avoid you.



The area occupied by a tram is marked by paving or markings on the road surface. This 'swept path' must always be kept clear. Anticipate well ahead and never stop on or across the tracks or markings except when in queuing traffic or at traffic lights.

Take extra care when you first encounter trams until you're accustomed to dealing with the different traffic system.

Crossing points

Deal with these in exactly the same way as normal railway crossings.

Also bear in mind the speed and silent approach of trams.

Reserved areas

Drivers mustn't enter 'reserved areas' for the trams, which are marked with white line markings, a different type of surface, or both.

The reserved areas are usually one-way, but may sometimes be two-way.

Hazards

The steel rails can be slippery whether it's wet or dry. Try to avoid driving on the rails and take extra care when braking or turning on them, to avoid the risk of skidding.

Take care also where

- the tracks run close to the kerb to pick up or set down passengers
- the lines move from one side of the road to the other.

Tram stops

Where a tram stops at a platform, either in the middle or at the side of the road, follow the route shown by road signs and markings. If there's no passing lane signed, wait behind the tram until it moves off.

At stops without platforms, don't drive between a tram and the left-hand kerb when the tram has stopped to pick up or set down passengers.

Warning signs and signals

Obey all warning signs or signals controlling traffic. Where there are no signals, always give way to trams.

Diamond-shaped signs or white light signals give instructions to tram drivers only.

Do

- watch out for additional pedestrian crossings where passengers will be getting on and off the trams. You must stop for them
- make allowances for other road users who may not be familiar with tram systems

- be especially aware of the problems of cyclists, motorcyclists and moped riders. Their narrow tyres can put them at risk of slipping on or getting stuck in the tram rails.

Don't

- try to race a tram where there isn't enough road space for both vehicles side by side; remember the end of the vehicle swings out on bends
- overtake at tram stops
- drive between platforms at tramway stations. Follow the direction signs
- park so that your vehicle obstructs the trams or would force other drivers to do so. Remember that a tram can't steer round an obstruction.



Section eight → Junctions

This section covers

- Approaching a junction
- The junction routine
- Turning
- Emerging
- Lanes at junctions
- Types of junction
- Junctions on hills
- Junctions on dual carriageways
- Roundabouts