



CODE FOR COUNTRYSIDE ROADS

Your guide to using rural roads safely and respectfully



To download the Code for Countryside Roads and learn more about NFU Mutual's rural road safety work, scan here



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FOREWORD

Rural roads are the arteries of our countryside, vital to the rural economy and serving to connect us all to the benefits of the great outdoors.

It is therefore all the more concerning that each year a vastly disproportionate number of lives are lost on rural roads.

Vulnerable road users like people walking, cycling and riding horses also continue to shoulder a greater risk. Sadly, this reflects a persistent trend which suggests that road users are not adequately equipped to deal with the unique hazards of rural roads.

That is why NFU Mutual has been campaigning for a number of years to improve rural road safety by raising awareness of the risks inherent to countryside roads, and why we are proud to publish this Code for Countryside Roads to provide a clear guide on how people should use rural roads.

The Code has been developed in consultation with our campaign partners and based on feedback from over 700 members of the public. It is available to everyone, free of charge, and we hope it will help steer a course towards safer rural roads for all.

Nick Turner
Chief Executive, NFU Mutual

ABOUT THE CODE FOR COUNTRYSIDE ROADS

NFU Mutual's Code for Countryside Roads is intended as a guide for everyone on the safe and respectful use of rural roads to reduce the tragic and avoidable loss of life in our countryside.

The Code is supported by the farming unions of all four nations, the British Horse Society, Older Drivers Forum, the Farm Safety Foundation, and the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), and has been produced with input from these partners and members of the public to ensure common concerns are addressed.

This is not a legal document and focuses purely on advice for those using rural roads, which have unique hazards not experienced in urban areas. All road users should adhere to the rules in the Highway Code.

The Code for Countryside Roads is supported by



RESPECT RURAL ROADS

According to NFU Mutual's latest analysis of Department for Transport figures, there were 70% more deaths on Britain's rural roads in 2023 than there were on urban roads. Collisions on rural roads are also around four times more likely to result in a fatality.

Countryside roads have unique and diverse hazards which are often entirely different to those on urban roads and require a specific set of skills and awareness. These common hazards include:

- Higher speed limits
- Changing speed limits
- Blind corners, junctions or field entrances
- High speed corners and junctions
- Narrow carriageways and single lanes with no hard shoulders
- Poor road condition
- Overgrown verges
- Undulating roads
- Limited/no road lighting or road markings
- Ice, compacted snow and fog on ungritted roads
- Mud and debris on the road
- Agricultural vehicles
- Livestock and wild animals
- Vulnerable road users (e.g. people walking, cycling, riding horses or carriages, or people riding motorcycles)
- Parked and stationary vehicles at passing points.

RESPECT RURAL ROAD USERS

Countryside roads are both the arteries of the rural economy and the gateway for millions of people to enjoy all the outdoors has to offer.

It is important that road users respect that everyone has a right to use rural roads, both for work and for leisure, and have patience with slower-moving traffic or those who may not be confident driving on countryside roads.

21% of people admit to being uncomfortable using rural roads*

13% of people have been involved in a collision on a rural road*

*Survey of 2,068 people conducted by Yonder for NFU Mutual.

WHAT IS A RURAL ROAD?

The UK's rural road network is large and diverse. Excluding motorways, it consists of A roads, B roads, classified and unclassified roads, with the majority of fatalities occurring on high-speed A roads.

Each of these roads may have a different profile throughout their course, such as changing speed limits, narrower lanes and varying levels of road marking and quality. They also frequently differ substantially from their urban equivalents, with unique hazards and risks for road users. Additionally, road classes may differ depending on location.

There are four categories of road in the UK:

- A roads – major roads intended to provide large-scale transport links within or between areas
 - B roads – roads intended to connect different areas, and to feed traffic between A roads and smaller roads on the network
 - Classified unnumbered – smaller roads intended to connect unclassified roads with A and B roads, and often linking a housing estate or a village to the rest of the network. Similar to 'minor roads' on an Ordnance Survey map and sometimes known unofficially as C roads
 - Unclassified – local roads intended for local traffic. The vast majority (60%) of roads in the UK fall within this category
- Motorways are a separate category of road.

CODE FOR COUNTRYSIDE ROADS:

Your guide to using rural roads
safely and respectfully

Plan your route

You should never try and adjust a sat nav or read a map while driving. Make sure you plan your route before setting off.

If using a sat nav, check along the route before setting off. Many devices will send you through what they think are the shortest or quickest routes, but these may be small or residential roads or require many turns, increasing potential hazards. Consider sticking to principal roads as much as possible. Following road signs is likely to be the best option if you are unsure of the most appropriate route.

If you become lost, pull over in a safe place before checking your route.

If you have an electric vehicle, make sure there are enough chargers along your route. Range anxiety can be distracting and not all rural roads will have safe points to stop.

Don't be complacent

Often collisions happen in close proximity to the home. It can be easy to operate on auto-pilot on familiar roads but make sure you pay attention throughout your journey.

Road layouts or use can change, so don't assume you know local roads.

Although you may be familiar with the road, others may not be. Be respectful to all road users by remaining patient, giving space, sticking to speed limits and driving to the conditions.

Over 60% of car collisions happen within 10 miles of the home*

*Survey of 2,000 drivers conducted by OnePoll for NFU Mutual.

Adjust and adapt to conditions

When using rural roads, check tyres, brakes, lights and windscreen fluid are functioning.

Always have a pair of sunglasses to reduce glare. Low winter sun can be particularly hazardous. Slow down or stop if you are dazzled by sunlight.

Even if it is hot outside, make sure you are wearing appropriate shoes for driving or riding.

Rain, snow and ice will increase stopping distances so adjust accordingly. In icy conditions, be mindful of black ice or compacted snow which may not be visible. Always be aware you may encounter slippery mud or leaves, particularly in wet conditions.

Roads underneath or on bridges will be the first areas to freeze in cold weather, so be aware when passing over or under one in winter. Shaded areas around trees and hedges may take longer to thaw.

Make sure you can be seen at night. Vehicles should have working lights and walkers, runners and riders should use lights and wear highly visible clothing.

Driving or travelling on roads at dusk or night puts greater strain on your eyes, so have regular eyesight tests and ensure you wear glasses if necessary.

Drive considerately

Always look well ahead to help anticipate potential hazards before they become a problem.

Do not pressure slower-moving road users by driving too closely behind and leave a two metre gap when passing, if possible.

Drive as smoothly as possible to reduce hazards. Brake and accelerate gradually.

Only overtake when it is safe to do so. This is when you can see clear road ahead, there are no corners or junctions, and there is sufficient room to pass by the side of the road user.

Concentrate on the road. Do not use headphones while driving and avoid excessively loud music or radio.

Always check for other road users and be considerate by keeping to your side of the road, rather than driving in the middle – even if there are no central markings. Identify passing places should you meet another vehicle in a narrow section and need to reverse.

Never cut blind corners, even if there are no central road markings, as oncoming road users may not be able to see around the bend.

React to oncoming vehicles

Consider the brightness of your headlights and dip these when around fellow road users.

On narrower rural roads, slow down and leave room when passing oncoming vehicles or other road users.

If a road is too narrow for two vehicles to pass, pull into a passing spot when you see it – do not force another vehicle to reverse if it's avoidable.

Be aware of where the sun is. A low sun may cause other road users difficulty in seeing you.

Beware of countryside residents

Be considerate of rural homes. A church spire can be a good indication that you are entering a village or hamlet, so adjust your speed when you see one.

Look out for signs that indicate you may encounter wildlife, whether this is road signs or herds in nearby fields. Avoid the urge to swerve away from wildlife, which could cause you to lose control, and do not brake heavily if there is a vehicle behind you. If the road is clear, you can brake and sound your horn.

Be aware that farmers will sometimes need to move livestock on roads, and this can happen at any time of the day. Slow down around blind corners so you can react to livestock in the road and be prepared to stop and wait for a few minutes while they come past. Do not stop in front of gateways or entrances as the farm animals may be turning into them.

Leave plenty of room before the livestock. Continuing to drive towards oncoming livestock can often spook them, adding further delays to the farmer and those using rural roads.

Be considerate of those who live in the countryside. Do not block driveways or field entrances as access is needed at all times and drive patiently and respectfully.

Be sensible about where you stop

Rural roads are essential to the rural economy and vehicles will need to regularly enter and exit fields. Do not park in the way of field entrances or farm access points.

On narrow lanes, passing places are needed to keep traffic flowing effectively, so only park in designated parking spots. Remember that wide vehicles may have to use these roads.

If riding a bicycle, horse, or motorcycle, or if walking, do not stop in the road if it is avoidable.

Speed limits, not targets

The speed limit is the maximum speed you are allowed to drive on a road, but it is not a target. If you do not feel safe or comfortable driving the speed limit, do not try to do so. Always adjust your speed to the conditions.

Principal roads will be higher speed but may still be winding or undulating, with traffic joining from T-junctions, making them more hazardous than motorways.

Adjust your speed when coming up to corners, junctions and built-up areas like villages or hamlets. Often, speed limits will change as you approach these hazards, but you should be aware anyway.

Be patient with someone driving below the speed limit and leave sufficient room behind them. Pressuring a slower driver will only increase the chances of an accident.

Only pass a slower road user if it is safe to do so and if there are no solid road markings between lanes. Allow faster moving traffic to pass you by pulling in where it is safe and legal to do so.

Adjust your speed to conditions. Wet, icy or snowy roads will reduce grip and increase stopping distances, so slow down when travelling in these conditions. Driving at night will reduce visibility, giving you less time to react, so even if roads are empty, you should not travel at excessive speed.

Beware of blind corners

Rural roads will generally have more blind corners, where you are unable to see oncoming traffic.

Slow down before entering a corner and keep to your side of the road.

Before entering the corner, be aware that traffic may be exiting unsighted from the other side of the road.

Keep an eye out for road signs indicating a particularly tight corner or for junctions on a corner.

Be particularly careful on corners where you can't see the exit or those blocked by high hedges.

Watch out for slower-moving vulnerable road users like cyclists and horse riders who you may not be able to see on the corner.

Navigating junctions

Slow down when coming to junctions to allow more time for those pulling onto the road, but only stop to allow a car to exit when it's safe to do so.

Indicate in plenty of time when entering and exiting junctions.

If you are exiting a junction to the right and are struggling to find time to cross the traffic coming in the opposite direction, consider turning left and taking another exit to get into the left-hand lane.

Slow down or stop completely before exiting a junction and do not inch out into the road.

Only exit a junction where there is a sufficient gap to do so without forcing the vehicle approaching the junction to brake hard.

Respect and protect vulnerable road users

Vulnerable road users include horse riders, carriage drivers, cyclists, motorcyclists, and walkers.

When overtaking vulnerable road users, leave at least two metres of room. Only pass when there is no traffic coming in the opposite direction.

Be patient. Do not rush a vulnerable road user and leave sufficient room behind them before passing.

Slow down as you approach a vulnerable road user.

Slow down to a maximum 10mph for horses on either side of the road and ensure you have passed them sufficiently before speeding up, accelerating slowly to avoid spooking the horse. If you cannot make the passing distance of two metres then wait behind the horse until you can make that distance.

Dip lights when approaching a vulnerable road user on either side of the road.

Remember road users such as motorists, who can do the more harm, have the greater responsibility for ensuring safety. Do not risk the life of a vulnerable road user.

Walk, run and ramble safely and don't make yourself a hazard

Use pavements or paths beside the road wherever possible.

Wear appropriate, visible clothing when walking or running on rural roads.

Walk on the right-hand side of the road and be aware that road users may not see you coming around corners. You should be facing oncoming traffic on foot.

If travelling in a group, do not block the road, and walk in single file. If the road becomes too narrow for vehicles to pass while walking, try to step onto the verge to allow vehicles to pass safely, especially if they are large or agricultural vehicles.

Do not stop in the road.

Only walk on appropriate roads, avoiding high-speed principal roads if possible.

Be aware of where the sun is. A low sun may cause other road users difficulty in seeing you.

Be aware of your surroundings and do not listen to music which drowns out what is going on around you. Using headphones can prevent you from being able to notice other road users and can increase the risks when travelling along the road.

Plan your route ahead of time to stay safe, using routes with pedestrian access where possible. Share your location with friends and family.

Consider using headtorches or other lights.





Ride respectfully

Wear appropriate protective gear and high visibility clothing when riding a bicycle or horse. This may differ at different times of the year and day. Remember to give motorists and other road users every opportunity to see you.

Be aware of your surroundings and do not listen to music which drowns out what is going on around you. Using headphones can prevent you from being able to adequately communicate with other road users if necessary and can increase the risks when travelling along the road.

Make sure your bike has lights – this will help you see and help you be seen by other road users.

Allow two metres and keep a low speed when passing other road users, and pass horses at no more than 10mph.

When in groups, you may ride two abreast but make room for faster-moving traffic to pass by when it's safe to do so – for example, by riding in single file when vehicles approach.

Be careful at junctions. Ensure you are visible and indicate clearly.

Avoid riding on the very edge of the road, but move in as you are able to do so to allow traffic to pass.

In slow-moving traffic and through sharp bends, ride in the centre of the lane to keep yourself and other road users safe by discouraging overtaking.

Be conscious of larger, slower vehicles behind you, like agricultural vehicles, which may hide you from other road users. Vehicles may try to overtake these slower vehicles without knowing you are there. Pull in to allow larger vehicles to pass if it is safe to do so.

Don't be tempted to 'hitch a lift', or grab hold of the back of a vehicle to pull yourself along. This is dangerous and the driver of the vehicle may not be aware of you, particularly if it is a large agricultural vehicle.

Be aware of where the sun is. A low sun may cause other road users difficulty in seeing you.

Protect yourself and your horse

Wear appropriate protective and high visibility clothing and think about yourself and your horse. The sooner fast-moving road users can see you, the sooner they are able to adjust.

Use clear signals to indicate your intention on junctions or at field or path entrances. Wearing long sleeved hi-vis clothing will help to make signals more visible.

If travelling in a group, do not block the road.

Do not stop in the road.

Only ride on appropriate roads, avoiding high-speed principal roads if possible.

Plan your route ahead of time to stay safe, using routes with bridleways where possible. Share your location with friends and family.

Be aware of where the sun is. A low sun may cause other road users difficulty in seeing you.

Be aware of your surroundings and do not listen to music which drowns out what is going on around you.

Consider using headtorches or other lights.

Be patient with agricultural vehicles

Rural roads are essential to farmers' ability to get around fields and produce food, so be patient with slower-moving agricultural vehicles – especially at busier times of the year like the summer harvest season. They will often be driving only a short distance, often to the next field entrance and most agricultural vehicle drivers will pull over when safe and practical to do so to allow built-up traffic to pass.

Only pass when it is safe to do so, and you can see clear road ahead. Be aware that agricultural vehicles may be turning into unseen field entrances and that following traffic could obscure indicators.

Some agricultural vehicles may need additional space to pull into a left-handed junction or field entrance, especially when towing trailers, and may pull right across the road before turning left. Be patient and wait until the vehicle has completed its manoeuvre before safely continuing past.

Do not drive too closely behind an agricultural vehicle. This will reduce time to react to it turning and will restrict your view of the road ahead.

Cyclists, motorcyclists, and horse riders should avoid passing an agricultural vehicle on the inside.

Be mindful of the vehicle's blind spots.

Operate agricultural machinery responsibly

Prior to venturing onto the road, check that all lights, indicators and rotating beacons are working. While beacons on agricultural vehicles are only a legal requirement to be lit on dual carriageways, they can be useful aids to increasing the visibility of agricultural vehicles on other roads.

Check and maintain braking systems.

Ensure mirrors and windows are clean and wipers and washers are operating so you have clear visibility of your surroundings.

Plan your route to avoid busier periods where possible. When travelling in unfamiliar locations, plan your route in advance and make sure that you're aware of any weight, height or width restrictions that could apply.

When moving 'oversized' agricultural vehicles, such as combine harvesters, ensure you comply with the legal requirements for movements of any vehicles three metres wide and over.

Make sure that you have a fully charged mobile phone available to be used when your vehicle is parked, to call for the emergency services if you are involved in any incidents or come across these when on rural roads.

Be aware that mounted and trailed implements will swing out when turning and could cause injury or damage to other road users or their property. Trailers with various axle configurations will swing out in different ways when making tight turns and allowances need to be made for this.

When you become aware of traffic building up behind you, pull over when safe and legal to do so, to allow faster vehicles to safely pass you.

When pulling into fields or farm entrances, use your indicators in good time, so that other road users are aware of your intentions. Take particular care when turning right, in case other vehicles are attempting to overtake you at that point.

1 in 4 people say navigating agricultural vehicles is their biggest concern when it comes to rural road safety*

*Survey of 2,068 people conducted by Yonder for NFU Mutual.

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