

This is a monthly column is written by John Hauskins, P.E., Director of the Maricopa County Department of Transportation (MCDOT). Among the duties for that agency is maintaining the roadways in Sun City and Sun City West. Each month he will address topics of interest to the readers of the *Independent* newspapers.

No Such Thing as a Golf Cart Lane

In one simple way it's very easy to talk about golf cart lanes in Sun City and Sun City West. Golf cart lanes do not exist on any roadway in Maricopa County. But the problem arises that many people think there are some, especially in the Sun Cities. Here is one reason for the misconception:

When the Del Webb Corporation designed and built the communities, the plans had very wide and winding streets. The appeal was to people who wanted to get away from congested traffic.

That design concept still appeals to many people, but it has developed some unintended consequences that probably could not have been foreseen in the late 50's when the Webb people were making their original plans. (Keep in mind that back then Bell Road did not even go west far enough to connect with US60/Grand Avenue!)

Many of the roads are approximately 40 feet wide. That means they're too wide for one lane in each direction (12 feet is the standard), but not really wide enough for two. So, following a national standard, MCDOT puts a solid stripe 12 feet to the right of the centerline. This is to discourage motorists from trying to make an additional car lane and passing vehicles in the right. That would be very dangerous.

However, many people interpret those lines as being specially made for golf carts. Though that is not correct we do encourage slower moving vehicles to pull as far to the right as possible. On some roadways that means driving to the right of the solid line.

We need to examine what is the purpose of those vehicles and that is reflected in their name. They are called golf carts because they were originally made for golfers to get around the course. Their original intent was not to be on major roadways.

Many government bodies have determined that there are some areas where it is in the public interest for people to be able to take certain types of vehicles on some public roadways. (Usually these are in or near retirement communities.) We at MCDOT understand and agree.

Generally, the rules are that these special vehicles must meet certain safety and operational standards, and it can't go on any roadway where the posted speed limit is greater than 35 mph. This is for the safety of the driver and passengers of the carts as well as other motorists who drive much larger vehicles and may not see the smaller carts.

When we explain the situation we're often asked, "There are bicycle lanes, why not golf cart lanes?"

The answer is that bicycles are not motorized vehicles and we want to keep them separate from the automobiles for safety reason. Golf carts on the roadway are motorized vehicles.

The truth is there are no specialized lanes for any motorized vehicles. Once we start doing that, where would it end? Would we need special lanes for different sized cars and trucks? What would we do if the number of lanes decreased at some point along the route, and everything was suddenly mixed together again. The presence of such specialized lanes is confusing and almost certainly would lead to unsafe vehicle conflicts on the roadway.

Safety on the roadways—for pedestrians, autos, cars, golf carts and trucks—is our primary concern and obligation.

While some people think a special lane for golf carts is necessary, the truth is such a lane would cause many more problems than it would solve.

And speaking of safety, I hope you wear your safety belt while you drive your cart.

Thanks for your time and attention in reading this column. Please share your thoughts and concerns about our roadways in your area with the MCDOT Community Relations Manager, Roger Ball. You may e-mail him your comments at rogerball@mail.maricopa.gov and we will address them in future columns.

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