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ALERT

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TOP STORY

## RV sideswipes community bike ride near Flagstaff, reinvigorating safety concerns

**Adrian Skabelund**

Aug 29, 2023



First responders and cyclists assist riders after an RV sideswiped a community bike ride on Lake Mary Road Saturday.

Adrian Skabelund

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**S**even cyclists were injured and three hospitalized Saturday when an RV

sideswiped riders partaking in a weekly community bike ride on Lake Mary Road.

## **Video of Lake Mary bike sideswiping incident**

**Viewer discretion is advised**

VIEWER DISCRETION ADVISED: The collision occurred Saturday as a group of about 30 riders took part in a weekly community bike ride on Lake Mary Road at about 10:30 a.m., according to the Coconino County Sheriff's Department. Of those impacted, several were members of team Pay-N-Take, a competitive cycling team associated with the popular downtown bar. All of those hospitalized have since been discharged from the hospital. The driver of the RV, who stopped shortly after the incident, was not detained but cited for failing to give cyclists enough room while passing, said Sheriff's Office Lieutenant Adam Simonsen.

Courtesy

It is an incident reminiscent of several other tragedies in and around Flagstaff over the years, when motor vehicles have collided with individuals on bikes.

The event sparked renewed outrage and concern for bike safety throughout the community.

The collision occurred as a group of about 30 cyclists took part in a weekly community ride on Lake Mary Road at about 10:30 a.m., according to the Coconino County Sheriff's Office.

Of those impacted, several were members of team Pay-N-Take, a competitive cycling team associated with the popular downtown bar.

All of those hospitalized have since been discharged from the hospital.

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The driver of the RV, who stopped shortly after the incident, was not detained but cited for failing to give cyclists enough room while passing, said Lt. Adam Simonsen with the sheriff's department.

The citation is a civil violation and carries a fine of up to \$500. According to Simonsen, there is no evidence the driver had broken any other laws or was under the influence.

Video of the incident taken from the back of one of the riders has circulated on social media and was provided to the Arizona Daily Sun.

The video, which is violent in nature, depicts the group of cyclists traveling along the edge of Lake Mary Road when the side of the RV slams into one of the riders. The rider is flung to the ground, colliding with several others.

Kyle Hornbeck is a member of team Pay-N-Take and owner of Single Track Bikes, and was on the ride. He said the last few days have been a blur of emotions as he and others try to make sense of what happened and do what they can to help those who were most impacted.

"I bounce back and forth between trying to make sense of it, put myself in

everyone's shoes and just trying to operate from a place of how can I be helpful," Hornbeck told the Arizona Daily Sun. "I'm less concerned about punishment for the driver, just more concerned with diagnosis and prognosis of my friends and teammates."

Hornbeck has set up a GoFundMe to assist the victims with medical and legal expenses associated with the collision. Those wishing to donate can visit **[gofund.me/7b1a9489](https://gofund.me/7b1a9489)**.


Lake Mary Road has long been popular with cyclists and runners either looking to train or recreate.

The Saturday community ride on Lake Mary has been occurring since the 1980s. And it is an event that Hornbeck said team Pay-N-Take has long taken part in each week.

"It's just a lot of good, positive energy, good camaraderie. And part of our training throughout the year is to participate on this group ride," he said. "So that's the thing that really continues to bring us together is, if nothing else, we meet up once a week and enjoy a competitive but recreational ride out and around Lake Mary and back."

While the road is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, it is often managed and maintained by Coconino County.

In a statement after the collision, county officials said they have worked to improve safety conditions on the road for cyclists and runners.

 For advocates of bike-friendly infrastructure changes, the gears of government turn slowly

"With the support of the Federal Highway Administration, the county has invested funds in this corridor increasing the width of shoulders for runners and cyclists, as well as improvements to the roadway surface, and increased maintenance such as

sweeping the shoulders to remove cinders and other debris,” a statement from the county read. “This past summer, Lake Mary Road has undergone routine maintenance including resurfacing portions of the roadway, crack filling, shoulder sweeping and roadside drainage maintenance.”

It is not clear whether the incident will spur additional efforts to improve safety along the road.

Simonsen said Lake Mary Road is not thought of by deputies as particularly hazardous, but it is well-known that it is heavily used by both cyclists and runners.

He said the office often receives complaints from cyclists about vehicles passing extremely close to them on the road -- and they also get complaints from drivers about cyclists taking up too much of the road.

## Cycling safety

This most recent incident is just one more example in a long line of collisions between vehicles and cyclists throughout the years.

In 2021, Flagstaff resident Joanna Wheaton was killed and several others severely injured when a large tow truck drove through a bike parade at the intersection of Butler Avenue and Beaver Street.

The incident sparked anger and frustration among many, spurring renewed calls for the creation of a safer environment for cyclists and pedestrians in Flagstaff. And the city rushed to install controversial concrete barriers between bike and vehicle lanes along both Butler and Beaver.

 'Moved by the human struggle': Family, community remember local activist Joanna Wheaton

In 2005, resident Matt Kelly was struck and killed by a drunk driver while biking along Cedar Avenue. That incident led to the construction of the memorial Matt Kelly Urban Trail Bridge over East Forest Avenue, connecting the urban trail on

the southern and northern sections of McMillan Mesa.

But earlier this year, bike advocates lamented the lack of progress Flagstaff has made in creating a bike-friendly environment.

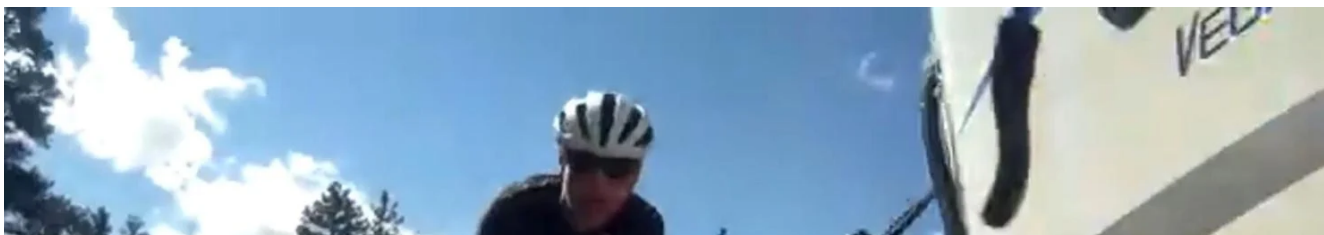
Adam Shimoni, a former councilmember, has long advocated for safer biking infrastructure in and around Flagstaff, and said Saturday's collision is just one more tragic example of the threat motor vehicles pose to those traveling on bikes or walking.

"This is a very challenging time for the community, and a time where the community is grieving once again from an incident where cyclists are in danger," Shimoni said. "Those of us who are on our bikes and travel by foot are extremely vulnerable and at risk, and it's concerning. It's a problem and it needs to be addressed by the city and the county."

In an environment in which distracted driving is commonplace, Hornbeck said he hopes drivers understand the responsibility they have behind the wheel, especially in the wake of Saturday's events.

And he implored motorists to remember that, even if they get annoyed by sharing the road with bicycles, there is a human being riding on that bicycle.

"It's very easy for a pissed-off motorist to take the human element out of the cyclist and the cyclist's existence there in the bike lane, because it's just something in the road as you pass them doing maybe twice their speed," Hornbeck said. "And I just think continued visibility for cyclists in the community, knowing that they've got a legal right to be there, and that we do belong on the road. That's a really easy, simple place to start."





This screenshot from a video provided to the Arizona Daily Sun shows an RV sideswiping a member of a community bike ride on Saturday near Flagstaff. No one was seriously hurt in the accident, but three people were hospitalized with injuries.

Courtesy

## The collision

Hornbeck was about 50 feet ahead of the impacted cyclists when the collision occurred. The group was little more than two hours into what is normally a three-hour weekly ride, about half a mile south of the Ashurst Lake intersection.

“We're coming down a decline. We call it the steps -- that's like the slang for that area. When you're climbing it, it's the steps and it's really hard. And it's an incline and it's just a really good challenge. When you're coming down you're going 30 to 45 miles an hour, depending on what part of it is. So you're almost keeping up with traffic there,” Hornbeck said. “We stay in the bike lane or as close to it as we can, riding side by side as we typically do; they call it two abreast.”

As they descended, the RV attempted to pass the group, slamming into one of the riders.

“The rest of the group is behind us and a little compact. And from my perspective, what went down was a [vehicle] screamed past us and then a fender, a piece of his wheel well, flipped up and brushed against the guy I was riding with,” Hornbeck said. “And we start hearing, ‘Stop, stop, stop, they've all been hit.’”

The RV pulled to the side and 911 was contacted.



Hornbeck said it was hard not to immediately think back to the 2021 bike parade collision and prepare for the worst.

Since the incident, he said, he has struggled to understand how it happened, and the video didn't help answer those questions.

"After seeing the video, it just seemed like less of an accident. Then again, maybe it could have been. But again, that video is now in the public domain on Instagram. So people can make of it what they want," Hornbeck said. "I'm not really trying to be an activist. It's just good to let people know that regardless of what you think of cyclists or where we should and shouldn't be riding, we do have a right to be out there and if you pass us, you've got to do so in a certain way."

Hornbeck also thanked the Coconino County Sheriff's Office, Mormon Lake Fire Department and Guardian Medical Transport, all of which responded to the collision.

"It's pretty incredible when you can make one phone call and millions of dollars of resources just show up to help you, regardless of who you are. They're not busy making judgments on who we are, where we were, what we were doing -- they're there to help keep us alive," he said.

## Dapper Dre gets back on his bike

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By Adrian Skabelund

City and environment reporter