

## Focused Topic: Light Rail

SHORT LESSON APPROPRIATE FOR IN-CAR OR CLASSROOM

### Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, the student will be able to explain how to safely drive around light rail, including:

- Turning safely across a light rail track
- Maintaining awareness of pedestrians using light rail

### Materials

- *Light Rail* Video [may be streamed or downloaded in advance of class]

### Introduction

Share the following with students: *In places where light rail is present, drivers can find themselves literally sharing the road with trains: light rail tracks can be embedded directly in the streets cars are driving on. Turning, parking and alertness to pedestrians all require special attention when driving near light rail.*

*We're going to watch a short video that introduces a few key aspects of safely driving near light rail, and then talk about what we've seen.*

### Watch Video

#### ***Light Rail*** [2:28]

Review students' understanding of driving safely around light rail trains and tracks. Begin by sharing and discussing the following scenario as a class, then review the rules for safely turning left across a light rail track.

**Red Light, Green Light** Read the following scenario aloud to the class:

*You are driving in an area where light rail is present. In fact, you are driving parallel to a light rail track. It is to your left. You are in the left lane, and want to make a left turn. You pull up to an intersection and come to a stop at a red light. The traffic to your right begins to move and you almost start driving along with them, but realize your light is still red. Why would this be?*

**Answer:** If you are in a left turn lane with a dedicated signal, that light will let you know when it is safe to cross the track and when it isn't. If the traffic to your right has a green light, but you still have a red, a train could be approaching the intersection—it's safe for traffic to drive forward, but not safe to turn across the tracks.

Ask the class to recall the rules for safely making a left turn across a light rail track.

*(Obey all traffic lights. Only turn left across a light rail track on a green light or arrow. Before making the turn, be sure to look along the track for an oncoming train approaching from behind you. Never make a left turn at an intersection marked with a No Left Turn sign.)*

# Focused Topic: Light Rail [Extended Version]

EXTENDED LESSON APPROPRIATE FOR CLASSROOM

## Learning Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to explain how to safely drive around light rail, including:

- Turning safely across a light rail track
- Maintaining awareness of pedestrians using light rail

## Materials

- *Light Rail* Video [may be streamed or downloaded in advance of class]
- [Light Rail Safety Scenarios](#) Handout [copy 1 per students in advance of class]

## Introduction

Share the following with students: *In places where light rail is present, drivers can find themselves literally sharing the road with trains: light rail tracks can be embedded directly in the streets cars are driving on. Turning, parking and alertness to pedestrians all require special attention when driving near light rail.*

*We're going to watch a short video that introduces a few key aspects of safely driving near light rail, and then talk about what we've seen.*

## Watch Video

### **Light Rail** [2:28]

Explore and expand students' understanding of driving safely around light rail trains and tracks by sharing and discussing the following questions as a class. Note - some of these questions reference material just seen in the video and will be review for students, others are not based on materials explicitly introduced during the video, and introduce new safety information:

1. *What are the rules for safely turning left across a light rail track?*  
**Answer:** Obey all traffic lights. Only turn left across a light rail track on a green light or arrow. Before making the turn, be sure to look along the track for an oncoming train approaching from behind you. Never make a left turn at an intersection marked with a No Left Turn sign.
2. *You are driving parallel to a light rail track. You realize that you are going in the wrong direction and want to turn around. Making a U-turn will require crossing the light rail tracks. What do you do?*  
**Answer:** Wait to turn at the next intersection that is free from both a No U-Turn *and* a No Left Turn sign. It is dangerous to make a U-Turn across tracks mid-block.
3. *You come to an intersection with light rail tracks embedded in the street. There are no lights marking the intersection, only a stop sign. What do you do to make sure it's safe to cross?*  
**Answer:** Look both ways and listen to make sure a train isn't approaching.
4. *Why is it especially important to stay within lane markings when driving or parking near light rail?*  
**Answer:** Light rail trains can be wider than their tracks, and can hit a parked (or moving) car that is too close. Lane markings define the safe space for a car to drive or park in near light rail. When parking, make sure your whole vehicle—including side-view mirrors—are within the white lines, and *always* look for an approaching train before opening your door.

5. *Why is it particularly important to pay attention to pedestrians in areas around light rail stops?*

**Answer:** In places where there are light rail stops, a surge of people may suddenly cross the street. Pedestrians running to catch commuter trains, or focused on other things as they disembark, may be distracted and not paying attention to cars around them. It is important that drivers are aware and alert for pedestrians.

6. *You are driving parallel to a light rail track—it is to your left. You are in the left lane, and want to make a left turn. You pull up to an intersection and come to a stop at a red light. After a short wait, the traffic to your right begins to move. You almost start driving along with them, but realize your light is still red. Why would this be?*

**Answer:** If you are in a left turn lane with a dedicated signal, that light will let you know when it is safe to cross the track and when it isn't. If the traffic to your right has a green light, but you still have a red, a train could be approaching the intersection—it's safe for traffic to drive forward, but not safe to turn across the tracks.

## Streetcars and Trolleys

Share the following with students: *In some cities, there are slower moving, smaller rail vehicles called streetcars or trolleys. Unlike with most light rail tracks, cars may be able to drive in the same lanes as streetcars and trolleys, so it's very important to always be looking for signs that show you where you are allowed to drive. Just like with light rail, drivers must obey all signs and signals regarding where and when to turn, and should be mindful of pedestrians crossing near the streetcar stops.*

Pass out the [Light Rail Safety Scenarios](#) handout. Ask students to review the scenarios individually or discuss in pairs/small groups before discussing the correct answers as a class. The scenarios featured in the [Light Rail Safety Scenarios](#) handout with correct answers and related safety information for you to share during discussion follow:

### Can I Drive In This Lane?

In some places, particularly where there are streetcars or trolleys offering public transport, it can be okay to drive in lanes with tracks **as long as you follow all posted signs and signals**. In which of the following settings would it be safe and legal to drive in lanes with tracks? Why? If you were driving here, what would you need to keep in mind to stay safe?

- (a) A roadway with a lane marked with "light rail only" signs
- (b) A roadway that has pavement stencils in one of the lanes showing a transit vehicle
- (c) A roadway with trolley/streetcar tracks with no pavement markings or signs

**Answer:** Only (c). Remember to look carefully for any signs to indicate whether you are allowed to drive in the lane with the streetcar. Sometimes it is the absence of a sign or pavement markings that lets you know you may share a roadway with a streetcar or trolley.

### Streetcar Slow-Down

You are driving in an area where streetcars are common. You turn onto a road with streetcar tracks embedded in it, and see a sign clearly indicating that you are allowed to share a lane with streetcars. A few blocks later, you find yourself behind a streetcar. You slow down, and stop every time the streetcar stops to let passengers on and off. You are making very slow progress and beginning to feel annoyed. Can you drive around the streetcar?

**Answer:** If there is another lane of traffic traveling in your direction, you may switch lanes and pass the streetcar ONLY IF the streetcar isn't stopped and there are no posted signs that indicate this is illegal. If the lane

you are in is the only one traveling in that that direction, or posted signage indicates that passing a streetcar is prohibited, you...shall...not...pass.

## Light Rail Safety Scenarios

In some places, particularly where there are streetcars or trolleys offering public transport, it can be okay to drive in lanes with tracks **as long as you follow all posted signs and signals**. You may see these signs as you are driving near light rail:

**(Right/Left/Center) Lane for Light Rail Transit Only** - Lanes marked by these signs are for light rail use only. Do not drive in these lanes.



**Do Not Pass (Light Rail, Stopped Train)** - You may not pass trains in places where you see these signs.



Consider the following scenarios and the questions that follow:

### Can I Drive In This Lane?

In which of the following settings would it be safe and legal to drive in lanes with tracks? Why? If you were driving here, what would you need to keep in mind to stay safe?

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