

Freeway
Driving
Demands
Special
Skills



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Traveling today's highways can be a frustrating, confusing journey through a maze of roadblocks, detours and traffic jams. With more than 161,000 miles of paved road nationwide, negotiating the freeway system requires an alert, focused and informed driver.

Although ranked among the safest roadways in America, AAA believes driving on today's freeways requires more skill and better judgment than ever before.

For more than 100 years, AAA has played an important role in protecting and saving the lives of drivers, passengers, bicyclists, and pedestrians of all ages. AAA is dedicated to advancing the freedom of mobility and improving traffic safety.

This brochure is a compilation of safety tips and suggestions that can help you navigate today's freeways. The information contained in the brochure may help you:

- Better understand the need for planning your route in advance;
- Identify correct procedures for entering and exiting a freeway;
- Incorporate proper speed and lane selection;
- Identify the effects of fatigue on the driving task; and
- Prevent distractions.



Freeway Driving Skills

Depending on your location, they may be called freeways, expressways, or super-highways. No matter what you call them, the high speeds of controlled-access highways and the density of traffic traveling on them requires a special set of operating rules.

Freeway driving is different from driving on a regular street or highway because freeways are designed to move a greater volume of traffic at a higher rate of speed. Being a safe driver often depends on concentrating on driving, avoiding distractions, and applying patience and common sense.

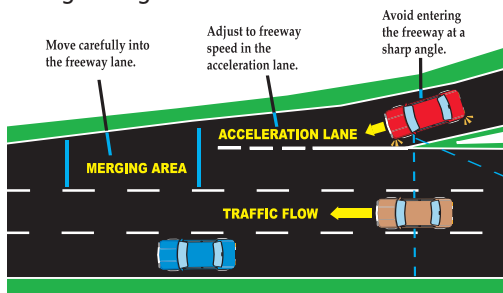
When traveling America's freeways, some simple practices may improve your safety. For example, you should:

- Try to look ahead at least 12 seconds to make sure you are alert to changing traffic and road conditions such as roadwork, congestion, heavy traffic, slow traffic, or stop and go traffic.
- Always signal at least five seconds before changing lanes. Look carefully and check your mirrors — both inside and outside rearview mirrors. And, look over your shoulder in the direction of the lane change.
- Avoid any sudden moves. Sudden moves are usually not well planned or checked, and do not give other drivers adequate time to react.
- Help other drivers enter and exit the freeway or change lanes. Adjust your speed or move to the next lane if it is clear.
- Drive in the lane that is best suited to the traffic conditions. On a two-lane freeway, use the right lane for cruising and the left lane for passing. When there are three or more lanes, use the right lane if you are traveling at a slower speed than traffic, the left lane for passing, and the center lane for cruising.
- Do not be distracted or slow down excessively to look at incidents in or near the roadway. This adds to congestion and increases the potential for additional incidents.
- Choose a legal speed that matches the flow of traffic. Speeds that are too slow or too fast will increase the risk of incidents.

Entering a Freeway

High-speed roadways normally have acceleration ramps to give you time to build up your speed. When entering a freeway from an on-ramp, try to increase your speed to match that of the freeway traffic. Do not merge into traffic until the solid white line has ended. Do not stop in the acceleration lane unless absolutely necessary. Remember, you must yield the right of way to the traffic already on the freeway.

Some freeway entrance ramps have traffic signals which regulate the release of vehicles onto a freeway. These signals make it easier to merge and provide a smoother traffic flow. If you are entering the freeway on a metered ramp you may be required to stop and wait to be released on a green light.



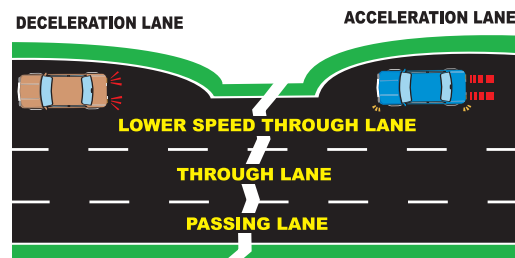
Look to the side and rear for a safe gap to enter. Frequently check the vehicle ahead in case it stops or slows suddenly.

The following steps can smooth the freeway transition process:

- As you approach the entrance ramp, check freeway traffic conditions.
- Always enter the freeway at or near the speed of traffic. Do not stop unless it is absolutely necessary. Stopping on the on-ramp is dangerous; vehicles behind you are not expecting you to stop.
- To merge safely, allow a three- to four-second gap in traffic: two seconds from the car in front of you and two seconds from the car behind you.
- Turn on your turn signal and adjust your speed to put you in the middle of the gap.
- As you merge, use your mirror and look over your left shoulder to make sure no traffic is in your blind spot, or moving into the right lane from the left.

Speed and Lane Selection

Generally, the right lane of a freeway is for entering and exiting the traffic flow. It is a staging lane, for use at the beginning and end of your freeway run. The middle lanes are for through traffic, and the left lane is for passing. If you are not passing someone, you should not be driving in the left lane. If you are traveling on a roadway with more than two lanes, you should move out of the right lane unless you are driving at a slower speed or preparing to enter or exit.



If you encounter an emergency vehicle on a freeway, you should move to the right as much as necessary to let it pass you on the left. You are not expected to pull right and stop as you would on other roads — doing so would be dangerous. Emergency vehicle drivers are trained to pass on the left, so it is important for you to move your vehicle to the right to allow them safe passage on your left.

Changing Lanes

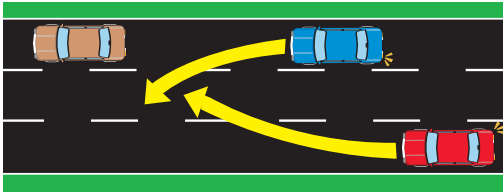
Before changing lanes, make sure you check for possible hazards or vehicles in the lane that you are planning to enter. This means you should check for traffic ahead, to the side, and behind your vehicle before you change lanes. Changing lanes includes:

- Changing from one lane to another;
- Passing another vehicle;
- Merging onto a roadway from an entrance ramp; and
- Entering the roadway from the curb or shoulder.

When changing lanes, you should:

- Turn your signal on;
- Check your mirrors;
- Check your blind spot by looking over your shoulder;

- Change lanes when you are sure it is safe; and
- Turn your signal off after completing the lane change.



Check over your shoulder and signal well in advance before changing lanes to avoid lane-change conflicts.

Passing

Whenever signs or road markings permit you to pass, you will need to judge whether you have enough room to pass safely. If you do, follow the steps above for changing lanes. Return to the driving lane when you can see both headlights of the passed vehicle in your inside rearview mirror. Do not count on having enough time to pass several cars at once. To minimize risk, pass only one vehicle at a time.

Do Not Pass:

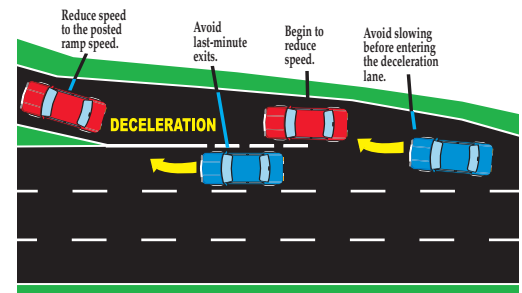
- If you cannot safely return to the right side before coming within 200 feet of an oncoming vehicle.
- If you cannot safely return to the right side before the solid yellow line begins.
- On a curve or hill when your view is obstructed.
- Within 100 feet of a marked or unmarked intersection, or railroad crossing.
- Within 100 feet of any bridge, viaduct, or tunnel when view is obstructed.

You may pass another vehicle on the right side on a one-way street or on a roadway with two or more lanes of traffic in each direction. You should never pass by driving off the pavement or main-traveled portion of the roadway.

Exiting a Freeway

As a driver preparing to exit the freeway, you should watch the road signs carefully, anticipate your exit, position yourself in the proper lane, and begin signaling your exit well in advance.

Do not slow down until you start to turn off the freeway. It is illegal to back up on a freeway, and you may not cross a median. If you miss a ramp or need to go back for some reason, you have no choice but to proceed to the next exit and double back. Crossover roads are for official use and emergency vehicles only. Using a crossover to turn back is extremely dangerous because you must enter the high-speed traffic in the left lane. Do not attempt to change lanes and exit the freeway at the last moment. Obey ramp speed limits for both entrances and exits.



When exiting, maintain the proper speed — fast enough so that you do not interrupt the flow of traffic and slow enough to exit safely. Most freeway exit ramps have a deceleration lane. The deceleration lane provides an area in which you can safely slow your vehicle without impeding the flow of traffic on the travel portion of the freeway.

Freeway Guide Signs

There are several types of freeway guide signs.

- **Regulatory signs** provide motorists information about traffic laws or regulations and indicate the applicability of legal requirements that would not otherwise be apparent.
- **Warning signs** call attention to hazardous conditions that would not be readily apparent to the motorist.
- **Guide signs** provide directions to motorists, informing them of intersecting routes, directing them to cities and other important destinations, and guiding them to available services, points of interest, and other geographic, recreational, or cultural sites.



Guide signs for expressways and freeways also have two sub-classifications:

- **Primary guide signs** display advance junction signing, exit directional signs, distance signs, exit signs and destination signs. On interstate freeways, exit numbers are included on primary guide signs.
- **Supplemental guide signs** provide the driver geographic orientation and secondary destinations at certain interchanges. Destinations include cities, motorist services, or traffic generators.

Among the many freeway signs, the most important are signs that inform you of your destination or exit.

Drowsiness and Driving

Driving requires a set of skills that are significantly impaired when you are sleepy. Research shows that being awake for 18 hours produces impairment equal to a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of .05 that increases to .10 after 24 hours of remaining awake. Drowsiness or fatigue cause:

- Impaired reaction time, judgment and vision;
- Problems with information processing and short-term memory;
- Decreased performance, vigilance and motivation; and
- Increased moodiness and aggressive behaviors.

“Old tricks” many drivers use to keep themselves awake simply do not work for long. Just because your eyes are open, it does not mean you are alert. The only way to keep yourself and your passengers safe is to recognize the symptoms of fatigue, which include:

- Eyes closing or going out of focus;
- Persistent yawning;
- Irritability, restlessness, and impatience;
- Wandering or disconnected thoughts;
- Inability to remember driving the last few miles; and
- Drifting between lanes or onto shoulder.

To avoid driving fatigued, follow these simple tips when you are planning long trips:

- Begin the trip early in the day and set reasonable daily itineraries;
- Share driving responsibilities with a companion by rotating driving shifts;
- Stop every 100 miles or every two hours to get out of the car and walk around; exercise helps to combat fatigue.
- Restrict night driving;
- Plan for a good night’s sleep; and
- Maintain a healthy diet, avoid heavy fatty foods, and limit your caffeine intake.

When the signs of fatigue begin to show, get off the road and take a short nap in a well-lit area. Do not stop on the side of the road.

Distractions

Almost everyone has made a driving mistake that can be attributed to being distracted. Missing a turn, running off the road, reacting too slowly to a driver stopped in front of you ... are usually caused when the driver’s attention is somewhere other than on the road.

Scores of drivers conduct business while on the road, rubberneck, adjust the radio, attend to children, eat and drink, use a cell phone, converse with occupants in the vehicle, read a map — all activities that divert your attention from the task of driving. Removing your eyes from the road or breaking your concentration from the roadway can lead to crashes, injury and death.



Using a cell phone, interacting with passengers, even changing radio stations can distract the vehicle operator.

State lawmakers across the United States are cracking down on distracted driving as research increasingly documents the perils of inattentiveness behind the wheel. Many states and localities are banning the use of cell phones while driving and are now enforcing laws that encompass distracted driving in general. Make sure to check the state laws before you begin your driving trip.

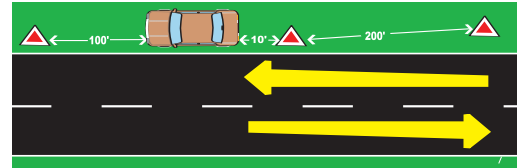
Staying Safe During a Breakdown

Vehicle breakdowns can be problematic on the freeway. Fast-moving traffic, narrow shoulders and gusts of wind from passing trucks can make breakdowns extremely dangerous to you and your passengers. By properly maintaining your vehicle, you can avoid mechanical failures that may result in you seeking help near the roadway. Make sure you give special care to tire pressure (including the spare tire), fan belts, hoses, and fluids.

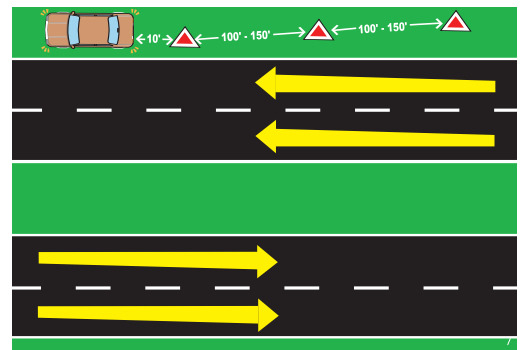
The following actions may be of assistance in case of breakdown.

- Signal, turn on emergency flashers and pull completely off the roadway.
- Set up flares or triangles 100 feet behind your vehicle.
- Raise the hood and tie a white cloth to the door handle.
- Stay in the vehicle if it is clear of traffic.
- Ask stopping motorists to alert a service station or the police.

- Many freeways have motorist services telephones at regular intervals. Drive or walk to a motorist services telephone only if it is safe to do so.
- Carry a first-aid kit in an easily accessible area of your vehicle.



Recommended placement for emergency warning devices on undivided highway.



Recommended placement for emergency warning devices on divided highway.

Freeway driving can be intimidating at times. The information provided in this brochure will help keep you safe and in control as you navigate your way while driving.

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