

M.E.S.A. Bike Tour - Support Vehicles

The ***M.E.S.A.*** Bike Tour Support Vehicles have an important part in the safety of the riders and the success of the tour. The following are some procedures and concepts we have learned from the first few tours that will be helpful to the drivers in assuring this success and safety.

In the mornings, immediately after breakfast, the weeklong riders may need to tend to their bikes. This will always include pumping air in tires and sometimes include minor adjustments. Drivers do not really have any part in this but any assistance offered is appreciated. Before heading out the riders will also need to fill their water bottles or hydration packs. They will be asking for ice and water and probably some sort of sport drink for a second bottle too. The main responsibility here is to make sure there is water and ice available and that the supply of sports drinks are adequate.

Ice and water are crucial to the riders if the temperatures are high. Drivers can usually obtain ample ice at the location where breakfast is being served. If not, ice will need to be purchased. Each vehicle should have a supplied 5-gallon jug for water.

Each vehicle should have two coolers. One should be for ice primarily, the other used to keep bottled beverages and some food items chilled. It is helpful when the drivers monitor the amount of ice in the coolers and how the supplies are holding out. Normally, ice only needs to be filled in the mornings but can also be refilled at the lunch spot too. The number of riders impacts these quantities – the day riders have full access to the supplies also and they can make a huge difference from one day to the next.

First aid supplies should be available and easily accessible. The driver is not expected to administer first aid – this should be done by the injured person. If something more than first aid is needed for an injury the driver will be expected to call for help or in a rare case to transport the injured person to the nearest hospital. In bicycling, the type of injury that occurs most often is “road rash” or scrape from a fall.

Following the tour group on the road is perhaps the most challenging aspect of being a tour driver. The procedure we recommend is what we call “leapfrogging.” Once the group is on its way, two distinct subgroups form, a faster and a slower group. The ***M.E.S.A.*** truck should stay mostly with the faster group and the bus should stay with the second group. In leapfrogging, the truck drives to an important turn on the route and aims the truck pointing in the direction riders are supposed to go (as much as that is feasible anyway). The driver waits until all in his group have gone through the turn then drives on ahead a few miles to another important turn and repeats the leaping process. The reason for this process is for the driver and supplies to be there when the riders need them. The driver should maintain a dialogue with the riders as they pass so he can keep tabs of their condition.

When riders need a rest they will take one. They usually prefer to rest near the vehicle so they can access water, ice or food. Also some will have personal items on board and need to get to them.

The lead truck should maintain contact with the place where we will be stopping for breaks or lunch or at the end of the day. The hosts there are always wondering where we are, if we will be on time, etc. The lead driver should call them when we get closer to assure them we are on time or early or late.

The two drivers should try to communicate with each other during the day also. It can be important to know how near or far the two groups are.

The drivers do have to keep track of the riders. In the morning, all riders are required to sign in on both drivers' sheets. Sometimes a rider will take a route different from what is offered. When this happens the rider should let the driver know where he is going and where he expects to return to the route. He does this with full knowledge no support will be available.

Drivers also need to be aware that as the days progress, riders tire out and the heat and humidity will impact individuals differently. Drivers are not always aware of this because they ride in air conditioned comfort.

The *M.E.S.A.* truck can handle only one passenger but the bus can handle over a dozen passengers. When riders get tired or the heat affects their ability ride, they need to ride the bus. In the case of inclement weather, it is up to the riders if they wish to continue riding in the rain – many will. However, if lightning is present or a severe storm threatens, all riders must get off the road. If the weather will impede progress significantly, we will all ride out the storm so we don't get too far behind on our schedule. The ride coordinator will make the call for when riders are to get off the road.

We have a schedule to follow and we are expected to be at certain locations at certain times. When our progress can not allow the schedule to be met, due to accidents, flat tires, or weather, we may need to all get on the bus to make our schedule in a timely manner.

The drivers are very important to the tour obviously. They can be the lifeline for riders, carrying necessary supplies and serving as our communication system with others. We realize it is not an easy task and appreciate the service provided.