

# Driver Safety Letter

presented by



## Roundabouts

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As most truck drivers know from experience, roundabouts were not designed for large trucks and are a potential safety hazard. Adding to this problem are hesitant, well-meaning passenger cars operators who drive with a higher purpose in mind. They see a roundabout as a place for good manners and “making nice” by allowing merging drivers to prematurely have “their turn”. This violates the law of roundabouts and creates risk to truck drivers who typically find themselves with no room to maneuver safely.

“Roundabout-avoidance” for trucks may be a future trend. Some fleets are already starting to plan driver runs to avoid roundabouts altogether in all but the most unavoidable lanes of traffic. But for the foreseeable future, truck drivers will face more roundabouts and will have to adjust to a higher safety threshold to avoid an accident.

Roundabouts have their selling points. According to the Federal Highway Administration and the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, roundabouts reduce crashes between 50%-75%; they reduce injuries by 73%; and they increase the flow of traffic and reduce delays by 50%. Also, they help reduce fuel usage by 30% and are less costly to build and have lower maintenance upkeep because there are no traffic lights. These are all positive from the standpoint of government policy and public safety, but many roadways with roundabouts are crowded with high volume traffic well beyond the design capacity of the roads themselves.

Here are several tips to guide you through roundabouts. First, the toughest part is overcoming a roundabout which takes you by surprise. Find out ahead of time from dispatch whether any roundabouts will be encountered and whether they can be avoided with no impact on delivery time and fuel cost.

Surprise will not be as much a problem for drivers traversing familiar runs with roundabouts every day. But even familiar roundabouts can be tricky to navigate and require heightened alertness because things can change quickly and without notice.

If you miss an exit, do not stop traffic by slamming on your brakes. Continue around the circle until you get safely back to your exit. Take your embarrassment in stride and patiently ‘round-the-bend’ again.

As you approach the roundabout, reduce your speed to the posted speed limit. You may need an even lower speed to operate safely if traffic is heavy. Always keep a sharp eye for pedestrians. They are seemingly everywhere and usually inattentive to your presence. Be especially alert for bicyclists. Remember this, they know their rights and may get in your path to prove it. Give them wide berth and stay safe for both you and the bicyclists.

Look to your left as you near the yield sign and broken-yield line at the entrance. Yield to oncoming traffic already moving in the roundabout -- they have the right of way and do not yield to entering traffic. Enter without yielding if there's no traffic in the circle. Stay in your lane, change lanes if necessary but only if traffic is clear, and use your turn signal before exiting.

In multi-lane roundabouts, pick a lane before entering the roundabout. To move straight or right, get in the right lane; to go straight or left, get in the left lane. You can also make U-turns from the left lane. Again, once you pick your lane, watch closely for pedestrians in the crosswalk. They also know their rights—which are superior to yours—and may pretend to ignore you. They have the right of way over vehicles and must be respected at all times.

In multi-lane roundabouts, you must yield to both lanes of traffic. Large trucks may straddle both lanes while driving through multi-lane roundabout. Once a gap in traffic appears, merge into the roundabout and proceed to your exit. Remember, less time is better in safely navigating a roundabout.

Many roundabouts have a truck apron which is a special section of concrete around the central island which acts as an extra lane for larger vehicles including tractor-trailers. The back wheels of the truck can ride up the truck apron so it may complete the turn. The raised portion of concrete is intended to discourage use by smaller vehicles. Nonetheless, avoid use of these truck aprons unless no other reasonable choice is available.

Remember, despite official claims that roundabouts are designed for vehicles of all sizes, savvy drivers will have their doubts, judge for themselves, and act accordingly. Roundabouts may not be designed for trucks, but truck drivers using careful and patient operating techniques around the circle can safely use roundabouts without accident or injury.

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