Who Is Liable When a Car Doors a Cyclist in Alabama?

Opening a Vehicle Door Into a Cyclist's Path Can Cause a Catastrophic Crash

A dooring accident in Alabama happens when a driver or passenger opens a vehicle door into the path of an approaching cyclist. The cyclist may strike the door, be thrown over the handlebars, or swerve into traffic and collide with another vehicle.

These collisions can happen beside street parking, outside restaurants and businesses, near schools, in bicycle lanes, or anywhere someone exits next to moving traffic. The person opening the door may have a limited view of the approaching cyclist, but that doesn't remove the duty to check whether it's safe first.

An Alabama bicycle accident lawyer investigating a dooring crash has to determine who opened the door, how long it was open, whether the vehicle was legally positioned, and whether another driver added to the cyclist's injuries. The investigation must also anticipate Alabama's strict contributory negligence rule, since the insurance company will likely try to shift blame to the cyclist.

At a Glance

- **Alabama Law Regulates Car Doors:** Opening a door on the traffic side is illegal unless it's reasonably safe and doesn't interfere with traffic.
- **Passengers Can Be Responsible Too:** The law applies to any person who opens the door, not only the driver behind the wheel.
- **Contributory Negligence Is the Main Battle:** Any fault proven against the cyclist can block recovery, so evidence of timing and visibility matters.
- **More Than One Party May Pay:** Employers, rideshare companies, and a second motorist may share responsibility for a cyclist's injuries.

A Dooring Accident Can Unfold in Several Ways

The cyclist doesn't always hit the open door. A sudden evasive move, a fall, or a second collision can still be caused by a door opened into the rider's path, and the exact sequence can affect responsibility, insurance coverage, and the medical explanation for the injuries. The table below shows common scenarios.

Scenario	What Happens
Direct door impact	The cyclist strikes the open door with the bicycle, shoulder, arm, chest, or head before falling
Over-the-door ejection	The front wheel stops against the door, and the rider flips over the handlebars or the door
Evasive swerve	The cyclist avoids the door but enters traffic, hits a curb or parked car, or loses control
Secondary vehicle impact	A cyclist knocked into traffic is struck by a passing car, truck, or bus
Passenger-side dooring	A passenger exiting a taxi, rideshare, or private car opens a door into a bicycle lane
Commercial-vehicle dooring	A delivery driver or service worker opens a company vehicle's door while stopped along the road

A cyclist doesn't need to dent the door to show that the door opening caused the crash. Video, witnesses, roadway marks, and the location of bicycle damage can prove that the cyclist took emergency action to avoid a sudden obstruction.

Alabama Law Prohibits Opening a Door Into Moving Traffic

Section 32-5A-219 of the Alabama Code prohibits anyone from opening a vehicle door on the side available to moving traffic unless it's reasonably safe and can be done without interfering with traffic. It also bars leaving a door open on the traffic side longer than needed to load or unload passengers.

The statute applies to any person, not only the driver. A passenger who opens a door without checking for an approaching cyclist may be directly responsible (liable) for the crash, and someone who leaves a door projecting into a bicycle lane may violate the law even if the door was first opened without hitting anyone.

A violation is important evidence of negligence, but it doesn't settle every issue. The cyclist still has to show the unsafe door opening caused the collision and injuries, and the other side may dispute whether the cyclist was visible or had time to react.

The Driver Isn't Always the Only Responsible Person

Identifying the person who opened the door is the starting point, not necessarily the end of the investigation. Several people and companies may have contributed to the crash:

- **The Person Who Opened the Door:** A driver or passenger may be responsible for failing to check mirrors, look behind the vehicle, or wait for the cyclist to pass.
- **The Vehicle's Driver:** Even when a passenger opens the door, the driver may be responsible for illegal parking, stopping in a bike lane, or choosing an unsafe spot to unload.
- **The Vehicle Owner:** Ownership alone may not create responsibility, but negligent entrustment or the owner's own role in the dangerous stop may.
- **An Employer:** A business may be responsible when an employee causes the crash while making deliveries, transporting people, or doing other work.
- **A Rideshare or Transportation Company:** App status, the purpose of the stop, and the driver's relationship with the company can affect a claim involving a rideshare, taxi, or shuttle.
- **A Second Motorist:** Another driver may share responsibility for speeding, following too closely, or passing without enough room before striking the cyclist.

Each responsible party may have separate insurance coverage and different defenses. Identifying everyone who contributed matters most when a cyclist suffers permanent injuries and a single policy can't cover the full loss.

Contributory Negligence Makes Cyclist Blame a Central Issue

Alabama's contributory negligence rule can prevent an injured person from recovering anything if the other side proves the person's own negligence helped cause the crash. That gives insurance companies a powerful reason to argue the cyclist was going too fast, riding too close to parked cars, looking at a phone, or riding without required nighttime lighting.

Those claims require evidence, and a cyclist riding beside parked cars isn't automatically negligent. Alabama also recognizes the last clear chance doctrine, which may still allow recovery when the other party had a final opportunity to avoid the crash and failed to take it.

The timing of the door opening is often the central dispute. A vehicle occupant may later claim the door was open and visible, while the cyclist remembers it swinging open right before impact, and surveillance footage, witnesses, damage patterns, and reconstruction evidence can show which account fits the physical facts.

Dooring Accidents Can Cause Severe and Permanent Injuries

A cyclist may experience several impacts in the same crash, striking the door, handlebars, pavement, curb, and a second vehicle in rapid succession. With no seat belt, airbag, or passenger compartment, the rider is exposed to every one of those forces. Common injuries include:

- **Traumatic Brain Injuries:** Striking the door, pavement, or another vehicle can cause a concussion, brain bleeding, memory problems, or lasting cognitive impairment.
- **Facial and Dental Injuries:** Direct contact with the upper edge of a door can cause facial fractures, eye injuries, broken teeth, nerve damage, and scarring.
- **Shoulder and Collarbone Injuries:** The impact or fall may fracture the collarbone, dislocate the shoulder, or tear muscles, tendons, and ligaments.
- **Arm, Wrist, and Hand Injuries:** Riders often reach out during a fall, causing fractures, ligament damage, nerve injuries, or loss of grip strength.
- **Spinal Injuries:** A violent ejection or second impact can damage vertebrae, discs, nerves, or the spinal cord itself.
- **Road Rash and Scarring:** Sliding across pavement can remove layers of skin and cause infection, nerve damage, discoloration, or permanent scars.
- **Crush Injuries:** A cyclist run over by a second vehicle may suffer internal organ damage, vascular injuries, amputation, or other life-threatening trauma.

A cyclist's claim has to account for more than emergency treatment. Surgery, rehabilitation, reduced earning capacity, permanent limitations, scarring, psychological trauma, and future medical needs can substantially increase the total loss.

Compensation Must Reflect the Cyclist's Full Losses

Medical expenses may include ambulance transport, emergency treatment, hospitalization, surgery, specialist care, therapy, medication, and anticipated future treatment. Lost income can become a major part of the claim, and permanent damage to the hands, spine, brain, or legs may reduce future earning capacity or force a career change.

The claim may also include pain, emotional distress, scarring, reduced mobility, loss of independence, and diminished enjoyment of life. Damage to the bicycle, helmet, phone, and cycling equipment may be recoverable too.

The parked vehicle may show little or no damage even when the cyclist suffers catastrophic injuries. An insurance company can't reasonably measure the claim by comparing repair estimates, since the rider's medical condition and long-term losses are the meaningful measure of harm.

Don’t Hesitate ... Call Dean Waite After an Alabama Bicycle Accident

If you or a loved one was hurt when a driver or passenger opened a vehicle door into a cyclist’s path, our attorneys at Dean Waite & Associates, LLC can investigate what happened, locate video, identify every responsible party, and fight back against attempts to blame the cyclist.

Our attorneys have secured numerous multimillion-dollar settlements and verdicts for injured people and families throughout Alabama. We examine the door opening, vehicle position, sightlines, insurance policies, medical evidence, and long-term effects of the injuries, and we pursue every available source of compensation.

There are no upfront costs, and you won’t owe an attorney’s fee unless we win your case. Contact us for a free consultation. Don’t hesitate ... Call Dean Waite!