Fig. 11-3 The center of mass O of a rolling wheel moves a distance s at velocity $\vec{v}_{com}$ while the wheel rotates through angle θ. The point P at which the wheel makes contact with the surface over which the wheel rolls also moves a distance s.

To see how we do this, pretend you are standing on a sidewalk watching the bicycle wheel of Fig. 11-3 as it rolls along a street. As shown, you see the center of mass O of the wheel move forward at constant speed v_{com}. The point P on the street where the wheel makes contact with the street surface also moves forward at speed v_{com}, so that P always remains directly below O.

During a time interval t, you see both O and P move forward by a distance s. The bicycle rider sees the wheel rotate through an angle θ about the center of the wheel, with the point of the wheel that was touching the street at the beginning of t moving through arc length s. Equation 10-17 relates the arc length s to the rotation angle θ:

$$s = \theta R, \tag{11-1}$$

where R is the radius of the wheel. The linear speed v_{com} of the center of the wheel (the center of mass of this uniform wheel) is ds/dt. The angular speed ω of the wheel about its center is $d\theta/dt$. Thus, differentiating Eq. 11-1 with respect to time (with R held constant) gives us

$$v_{com} = \omega R \quad \text{(smooth rolling motion).} \tag{11-2}$$
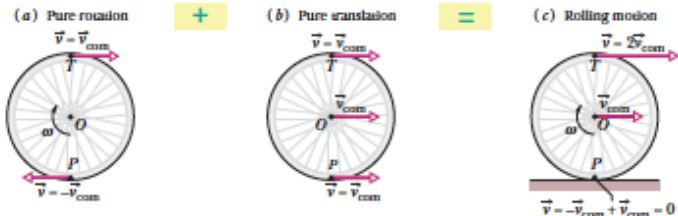

Fig. 11-4 Rolling motion of a wheel as a combination of purely rotational motion and purely translational motion. (*a*) The purely rotational motion: All points on the wheel move with the same angular speed ω. Points on the outside edge of the wheel all move with the same linear speed $v = v_{com}$. The linear velocities $\vec{v}$ of two such points, at top (T) and bottom (P) of the wheel, are shown. (*b*) The purely translational motion: All points on the wheel move to the right with the same linear velocity $\vec{v}_{com}$. (*c*) The rolling motion of the wheel is the combination of (*a*) and (*b*).