

Debbie Mohi

From: James Steward [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, 12 July 2013 11:08 AM
To: Transport Housing and Local Government Committee
Subject: Re: Inquiry into Cycling Issues

To whom it may concern,

Please accept this as my submission to be included in the committee's deliberations into cycling issues.

Long term trends in fatalities show that approximately 10 people die on Queensland roads per year while riding their bicycle. This is not a huge number, and hasn't increased despite the fact that the population has grown and bicycling appears to be steadily increasing in popularity over the past decade, but of course zero fatalities would be best.

This year there appears to have been a spike in the number of bicyclists hit from behind in Queensland, though I don't have precise figures to back up that claim.

Clearly bicycling for someone who is competent is reasonably safe. Safe enough that more and more people are encouraged to begin to ride. This introduces novice riders, who are far more likely to be involved in an accident. Even if they have a motor vehicle license, riding a bicycle presents a whole range of hazards that are simply overlooked or inconsequential to a motorist. Promotion of courses that teach how to ride safely and competently would help.

Some motorists have a bad habit of not seeing bicyclists, or at least claiming they didn't see the bicyclist after failing to give way.

Bicyclists use the acronym SMIDSY, which stands for "Sorry Mate, I didn't see you!" The fact there is an acronym in common use among bicyclists gives a good indication of the frequency that the excuse is used. Sometimes it may be legitimate, but in most cases a bicyclist's best defense is to move away from the left edge of the road, toward lane centre or the right wheel tracks.

Being hit from behind for a bicyclist who is riding legally (lights and reflectors in bad weather or at night), is not the most common type of collision. A motorist failing to give way is far more likely. A recent study I read found that failure to give way accounts for more than 50% of collisions. Sorry, I can't recall the source at the moment. However, for most bicyclists, close passes (motor vehicles passing with less than a metre clearance, say) feel quite threatening and dangerous.

As the speed of the passing vehicle increases, the threat level and perceived danger (even if it doesn't cause an accident) increases. The main reason is that bicyclists feel very vulnerable around fast moving 2 tonne vehicles. And so they should.

The reasons for legislating a minimum passing distance is to provide bicyclists with some safety buffer should they need to move around a pothole or obstacle on the road while being overtaken by a motor vehicle, or if there is a gust of wind that blows them off course for example, and to provide some more solid legal position should there be another Richard Pollett like case - I'm sure you're aware of the case I refer to.

Many roads do not have a wide enough left lane to safely share with a 4 wheeled motor vehicle. Motorists must be prepared to move into an adjacent lane to safely pass even a single bicycle rider. It follows then that if they must cross into the adjacent lane a little or a lot, it makes no difference to how much importance they must place on ensuring they can safely do so. That is, on a 2 lane road, if there is an approaching vehicle, they must wait until it is safe to pass a bicyclist without causing a hazardous situation to the bicyclist or the oncoming traffic. Crossing the road centre line by half a metre or 2 metres makes no difference to the decision making.

This brings up another topic. I heard recently that QLD police were booking motorists who crossed the centre line to pass bicyclists on a popular climb out of Brisbane. The next day the bicyclists all suffered close passes because the motorists didn't want a fine like the got the day before. Clearly the road laws need some relaxation, or the police need to exercise more discretion. In at least some US states there are laws specifically allowing motorists to cross the centre road marking to pass slow moving vehicles when it is safe to do so.

I also read about Brisbane police booking bicyclists who didn't stop at a stop sign at a particular intersection. Many of the riders interviewed claimed that if they did stop, they would have a hazardous time crossing the road starting from a stationary position, because of limited visibility and fast approaching motor vehicles. What seems obvious to me is that the speed limit ought to be reduced and enforced, or a traffic calming device should be installed to give the bicyclists half a chance to obey the road signs in the first place.

Bicycle lighting standards need to be addressed. There are many bicycle lights available that are not adequate, and bicyclists who ride without proper lights at night should be fined. The German bicycle lighting standard is probably the best known standard universally.

DayGlo and other special clothing should not be made necessary to ride a bicycle. Cars are not required to be special colours or use special paints, neither should bicycles or bicycle riders. Proper lights and reflectors are sufficient.

Bicycle lane designs are horribly stupid in many parts. Bike lanes marked adjacent to parallel parked cars, to the left of left turn lanes, and now with street furniture to make riding more hazardous.

Furthermore, a bike lane often makes sharing the road harder and more dangerous, and perpetuates what some motorists feel, that bicycles are not legitimate vehicles to be used on the road, by beginning to segregate bicycles from the motor traffic. From the motorists point of view, I must stay in my lane and the bike rider must stay in the bike lane and I can pass as close as I like provided I stay in my lane.

There is no provision for riding two abreast, and if the bike lane is unsuitable to ride in (maybe glass, rubbish, car doors, pedestrians, etc.) there's nowhere the bike rider can legitimately go anymore. I would personally prefer to have no on road bike lanes. I call them farcilities. They are mostly a farce. They may encourage novice riders by making them *feel* safe, but so often become the cause of their undoing.

Many of the comments and insults a bicyclist will hear from a minority of aggressive and bullying motorists will be about getting off the road, using the bike path, paying registration, etc. Some motorists feel the roads are for their exclusive use, and their license and registration makes it so and pays for the roads. Many motorists seem to not know the road laws that relate to bicyclists, like being able to perform a hook turn virtually anywhere they wish to turn right, or to ride two abreast on most roads and may be three abreast while overtaking, that bicyclists only have to ride as far left as "practicable" not "possible". These motorists need reprogramming for everyones sake. I've suggested to several influential people and MPs that one way might be to make mandatory printing of some carefully selected road laws (written in layman's terms) on every fuel docket. It costs the states nothing and subtly gets a message across to those who need it.

It is certainly a minority of motorists who make riding a bicycle both dangerous and unwelcoming. Some are simply inattentive, distracted, insufficiently patient and insufficiently skilled. Others are just plain aggressive and angry. The trouble is they are all very dangerous to a vulnerable road user like a bicyclist or pedestrian, and the current laws make it all too easy to kill someone and not share in the misery. I suggest a punishment that is more fitting. If you drive recklessly or negligently and cause injury or death to a vulnerable road user, you should not be allowed to drive for the same period as that other person cannot ride a bicycle or walk - for example.

I have held a drivers license since I was of legal age to obtain one. I have ridden bikes for a few years more. I've cycled approximately 250,000 km over about 25 years, and driven more than that. If I killed someone with my car through negligence or stupidity, I would gladly ride my bicycle and not drive again.

Sincerely,
James Steward.

