

Inquiry into Cycling Issues

A Submission from **the James Cook University Bicycle Users Group**

July 2013

Background

The James Cook University Bicycle Users Group represents the interests and concerns of cyclists to the University and other appropriate bodies. Our membership is diverse, as would be expected at a University, but united in the desire to see cycling recognised and supported as a sustainable, safe transport alternative. We believe that all people have the right to choose their mode of transport without limitation. Fear and uncertainty created by a lack of provision for cyclists on our roads is therefore an issue of social equity.

This document will attempt to assist The Committee consider the issues they have identified as being of interest.

The members of JCU BUG thank the Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee for allowing us to be a small part of this Inquiry.

Sincerely,

Adella Edwards

President, James Cook University Bicycle Users Group.

1. Short and long term trends in bicycle injuries and fatalities involving motor vehicles.

The perception of the wider community that cycling is dangerous is largely unsupported by the statistics on injury and fatality for Queensland. The cyclist fatality trends in Queensland 2006-2010, as reported by Transport and Main Roads¹ was less than 3% in the years 2006 to 2010, and reached 3.3% in 2012. In real terms this is an average of 9 deaths a year. Pedestrians on the other hand represent an average of 11.7% of road deaths.

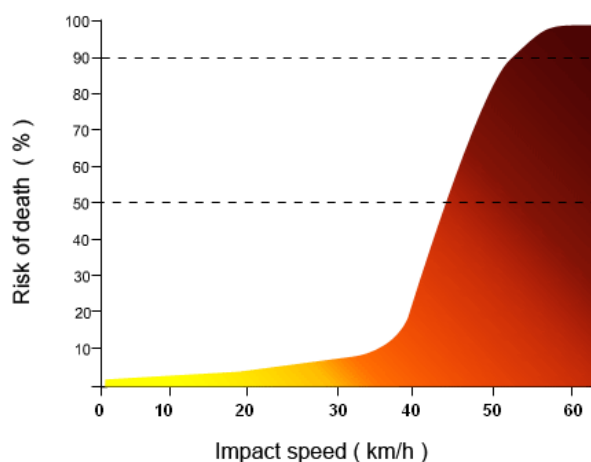
Injury statistics as reported by the Queensland Trauma Registry² allow us to consider danger in the broader sense by looking at cycling related injury. Injury by external cause (Transport crash) shows cyclists represented at 2.9%. The most common form of injury is falling (45.4%).

Cyclists can take comfort that they enjoy a mode of transport that is safer than walking or driving a motor vehicle for the most part. However, it is of concern that cyclists and pedestrians are placed at risk by a combination of inadequate road provision and poor driver behaviour. A recent research paper: Schramm, Amy J. and Rakotonirainy, Andry and Haworth, Narelle L. (2010) *The role of traffic violations in police-reported bicycle crashes in Queensland. Journal of the Australasian College of Road Safety*, 21(3). pp. 61-67³ finds that crashes involving bicycles and motor vehicles comprised 93.4% (n= 6,328) of police-recorded bicycle crashes. Of these crashes motorists were deemed to be at fault in 65.6% of the incidents. Significantly, when the motorist was at fault traffic violations were recorded in 85.4% of crashes.

Unfortunately, a key statistic which powerfully influences cyclist behaviour is unavailable. That is the number and frequency of near misses and incidences of road rage towards cyclists. Such events are often unreportable, and it may take only a few negative experiences for a commuter to decide to return to their car. They are statistically safe, but it doesn't feel that way on the road.

Finally, a Safer Cycling Roundtable sponsored by the Queensland Government on 12 December 2011 identified the top 5 priority areas for action, with a decrease in speed on urban and suburban roads found to be the most urgent.

Risk of death for pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists



1 figure from *Consequences of speed*:

<http://www.police.wa.gov.au/Traffic/CamerasCutCrashes/Speed/Consequencesofspeed/tabid/1767/Default.aspx>

The JCU BUG feels that improved and ongoing education of motorists, combined with lower speed limits would improve safety and amenity for cyclists and pedestrians.

¹http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/~media/Safety/Transport%20and%20road%20statistics/Road%20safety/Fatal_road_traffic_crashes_in_qld_2011.pdf

²http://www.som.uq.edu.au/media/327790/2010_qtr_annual_report_-_description_of_serious_injury_throughout_queensland.pdf

³<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/34208/1/c34208.pdf>

2. Evaluation, considering factors such as effectiveness, enforceability and impacts on other road users of existing and any other alternative road rules, such as the 1m rule, which govern interaction between cyclists and other road users.

The members of the JCU BUG support legislation to ensure a safe minimum passing distance of cyclists. Recent tragic events in Queensland have made it clear that motorists cannot always adequately judge a safe passing distance. A briefing paper by the Amy Gillett Foundation⁴ states that “A 1 metre minimum overtaking distance will provide a protective space that will significantly reduce the risk of crashes resulting in the death or serious injury of bicycle riders.”

We agree that such legislation, combined with improved and ongoing education of all road users regarding their rights and responsibilities on the road could save many lives.

⁴<http://www.amygillett.org.au/assets/PDFFileStore/AGF-Briefing-Paper-Minimum-Overtaking-Distance-Release-3-June-2013.pdf>

3. Current penalties and sanctions, including where there are differential fine rates for cyclists compared to other road users

The JCU BUG feels that moral hazard should come into play when setting penalties for road rule violations. The careless operation of a motor vehicle carries a risk greater to the community than to the driver. We feel it is appropriate therefore for cyclists to be fined less for a violation than a motorist for that same violation (ie, running a red light).

4. The potential benefits and impacts of bicycle registration.

The JCU BUG works hard to provide a service to international students giving them access to affordable second hand bikes and Austcycle training to learn how to ride safely in Australia. We would like to represent their case to the commission regarding bicycle registration.

International students and scholars come to the University for varying periods of time. Some stay as little as three weeks doing collaborative work, while others stay for a full semester or

longer. Many of these visitors wish to ride a bike while they are at JCU. Because our campus is accessible by off road paths, cycling allows those who are uncomfortable driving on the left hand side of the road to have another option. Also, many international students have commented upon returning their bikes to us that the ability to cycle in Townsville greatly enhanced their appreciation of the beauty of the city.

Annually we have sold about 30 bikes to students, who return them for a cash return of a portion of the purchase price. We are currently using money from a University grant to greatly expand this initiative and aim to have 100 bikes in our "green fleet" in two years time. Each of these bikes may return to us to be serviced and resold a couple of times a year. The time delay in getting a bike registered to an individual every time it changes hands would probably mean that short term visitors would never get to ride at all.

With the potential to have 200 - 300 registrations a year coming from our green fleet alone in a few years, the administrative burden and cost to the government should be carefully considered by the Committee. In order for this to be revenue neutral for government, the registration cost would probably be more than the cost to the student for a bike (\$30.00) and we worry many would be therefore be denied the pleasure of riding a bicycle in Australia.

From the point of view of JCU staff who are long time commuters, the turnover of equipment is not an issue, and the cost of registration might not be as burdensome. However, recent comments from our police commissioner regarding the filming of near misses by cyclists using helmet and bike mounted cameras might be informative to the committee. While a direct quote eludes me, he did state that the police service lacked the resources to cope with an influx of complaints about identified drivers who violate the road rules. It has also been my personal experience that reporting the registration number of a car after a near miss does not often result in police action, as there is no proof of wrongdoing and no actual harm was done. If registration cannot make motorists accountable for their actions, it seems unlikely it will do so for cyclists.

As a contribution to infrastructure, bicycle registration seems to offer very little. In every city, State controlled roads make up a very small percentage of the road network. It is the local council which builds and maintains the neighbourhood streets and bikeways which form a large portion of most people's utility cycling.