

Parliamentary Inquiry Submission
 Dated 25/07/2013
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To the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I am 69 years old, started cycling in 2005 in response to a debilitating arthritic condition that threatened my mobility. That I am now fully mobile and fit without the help of any drugs whatsoever is testament to the benefits of this low impact activity.

I cycle some 200 kilometres per week mainly for recreation, but with some utility trips thrown in. From 2006 I was heavily involved in cycling advocacy and got to work with the sunshine Coast Council and the Department of Transport and Main Roads. Relevant facts and figures are well covered in other submissions so I would like to make some comments gained from experience on the road.

During this time I was one of three volunteers who carried out a study on traffic behaviour on two narrow bridges on the Sunshine Coast. This involved fitting our bikes with front and rear facing cameras and side distance proximity devices. The study involved riding under different signage conditions on bridges that had double 'no overtaking' lines. The study is well documented and available should you require it. My point is that in the vast majority of cases on a bridge clearly marked as no overtaking zones, vehicles overtook the cyclist anyway even though that cyclist was travelling at 30 km/h. Conversely if you refer to the study you will see that the distance given by each vehicle was in fact more than one metre..

Let's take two items of the terms of reference:

The one meter rule

In my experience the only time vehicles overtake too close for safety is when the infrastructure promotes it. In other words it is my contention that with properly designed roads and cycle lanes it is very doubtful vehicles will encroach into a rider's 'space'. In the more than 50,000 kilometres I have ridden I have encountered very few 'close calls' when being overtaken on a straight road.

Roundabouts are a different story however, but the one meter rule would not apply because it is against the law to overtake a cyclist within a lane on a roundabout (lane sharing).

Due to the very low policing of 'soft' infringements how can the one meter rule help ?

In my experience motorists take very little heed to these 'soft' infringements like overtaking on double white lines or lane sharing on roundabouts. In fact it would be fair to say these types of infringements are generally ignored by police in the same way that not indicating when leaving a roundabout is. It is very doubtful in my view that a one meter rule would be policed at all.

We also should consider the perception of distance by the average driver, most would not have a clue how wide a meter is especially when calculated at an oblique angle on the nearside of their vehicle. We should also ask ourselves how would the one meter rule become relevant in an accident?

Registration of bikes

First we should ask ourselves what the benefits of registration would be.

(a) Law enforcement; bicycle riders would not be able to 'escape' enforcement when they break the law or would they? Bearing in mind my earlier comment about police ignoring 'soft' infringements the only way a rider could be charged is by being reported by a member of the public who is prepared to go to court to give evidence. I see two problems with this; (a) The size of the number plate, bicycles would be incapable of carrying a number plate large enough to be read by another

driver and (b) Very few drivers are actually prepared to attend court to give evidence on a traffic offence.

(b) Revenue; This would be admirable if the amount of registration were significant and the nett income generated were to be used to improve infrastructure, however the public outcry emanating from hefty registration charges would be intense.

The case against registrations

It would be ludicrous to force children to register bikes

The small size required for number plate would not be readable at more than a few paces and certainly not through a car window.

It would be cumbersome to implement and would create yet another level of officialdom

It would be a huge disincentive to getting more bicycles to replace single passenger car trips.

It would only serve to satisfy those who are angry because bikes can sometimes prove an impediment to their right of passage. Perhaps they feel that their anger would be mitigated if the bicycle that was holding them up were registered. I don't think so.

So we really must ask ourselves this. Would the registration of bicycles cut down the number of accidents or would it be merely a punitive act rendering a great disincentive to replace the family car with a bike.

I have never been hit by a car, a friend has been cycling for 40 years, from Melbourne through Canberra to the Sunshine Coast, he has never been hit by a car either. Why do I think this is relevant?

It all comes down to skill and attitude. In my case I *never* assume I have the right of way, I wear bright colours and highly visible flashing lights front and rear. I look at the drivers eyes to try to judge if they have seen me, even then I will slow if I am not sure they have seen me. There is a point at which it becomes too late to stop which I look at as the point of no return, as much as possible I ensure the driver has seen me before I accelerate again. I wear a highly visible helmet camera which I turn towards the driver I feel may be a threat (it is amazing how much notice drivers take when see a camera). I take control of the lane in roundabouts where I feel it is warranted by holding the centre to prevent overtaking. I am courteous, I display clear hand signals, I acknowledge courteous drivers with a wave and a smile. On regular routes drivers get to know my wife and I and give us plenty of room even waiting behind on roundabouts.

Why do I make these points ? In my opinion there are only two things that need to be added to the mix to create a safer environment for cyclists while also increasing this eminently sustainable form of transport:

1. Improved infrastructure; this should be a priority, it is well documented that the returns on investment in cycling infrastructure far outweigh that of motor vehicles.
2. Education; Cycling is an emerging culture, it has grown suddenly, so suddenly in fact it has caught all parties by surprise, especially the motoring public who don't see the benefits of cycling, all they see is an impediment to their progress on the road. Not only driver education, but also bicycle rider education as well. I think I have proven that a defensive approach to riding a bicycle goes a long way towards decreasing the accident rate.

In summary I believe that punitive or knee jerk reactions to the problem will not solve anything and may even serve as a disincentive to the numbers of potential bicyclists getting out of their cars, adding years to their lives, lowering our health costs and helping to improve congestion on our roads.

Yours sincerely
John Stephen