

25 July 2013

The Research Director
Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee

Inquiry into Cycling Issues – Submission

Dear Sir / Madam,

Thank you for addressing and taking public comment on the issue of cycling safety and legislation in Queensland.

I refer the Committee to the submissions from [Ben Stanley](#) and [Aaron Ball](#). They detail my most pressing concerns as a cyclist, and I fully agree with their recommendations.

To that, I would like to add some personal comments on cycling in Queensland with regard to the inquiry's terms of reference.

Introduction

I am a 25-year-old CBD worker who has been commuting by bike for just over one year. I ride 40 kilometres a day, five days a week. I cycle because it gives me more energy and is less stressful than other modes of transport. Simply put, it is fun.

It is saddening and frustrating that the current state of cycling here leaves many people believing the exact opposite.

The general perception of cycling as an exercise in taking your life in your hands, while not without merit, needs to change. The best possible outcome of this inquiry is a shift in public perception from "Cycling is a dangerous hobby/sport for children and/or lycra-clad MAMILs" to "Cycling is a safe and enjoyable mode of transportation for people of all ages".

Only then will Queenslanders truly embrace cycling as a legitimate form of transport, and only then will we achieve safety in numbers.

Dangerous motorist and cyclist behaviour should be actively discouraged and appropriately punished

Queensland motorists are notorious for their poor attitude toward cyclists and even poorer driving skills around cyclists. Many of the submissions to this inquiry are full of horror stories to this extent.

Meanwhile, cyclists are often thought of as red-light running, road-hogging louts with utter contempt toward cars and pedestrians alike.

I have found these stereotypes hold true for only a small percentage of drivers and cyclists. The majority are courteous and considerate. Unfortunately, the few rotten apples have fed growing animosity between both groups.

I believe current measures to reprimand those who behave dangerously on the road in cars or on bikes are inadequate.

Motorist actions such as “punishment passing”, horn honking and tail-gaiting, swerving towards cyclists or throwing objects at cyclists need to be treated more seriously in the eyes of the law. I have heard too many stories of cyclists who have given video evidence of such behaviour to the police, only for their cases to go nowhere.

I will never forget one dark and rainy afternoon when a ute driver honked his horn behind me for 200 metres before side-swiping then cutting across in front of me. These drivers must be taught that their bit of “fun” or “justice” is life-threatening.

On the other hand, not all cyclists are angels. Every so often I see other riders sail through red lights, ride more than two abreast or make dangerous turns across oncoming traffic.

These riders give all cyclists a bad name. They lead a few misguided individuals to drive dangerously around other cyclists to “teach them a lesson”. They lead many people to think “Cyclists should get off the road because they think they’re above the law/are a danger to themselves”.

These riders must be taught that their behaviour is not only reckless, but an indictment – whether they like it or not – on all cyclists.

A minimum safe passing distance should become law

The trauma suffered by [John Stokes](#) and [Wendy Williams](#), the death of [Richard Pollett](#), and other tragedies like them should be all that needs to be considered on this issue. Whether 1 metre or 1.5 metres, whether or not it would be easily enforceable, a legal minimum safe passing distance is needed.

If it made just one driver reconsider squeezing past a cyclist on a too-narrow road, and averted another tragedy in the process, it would be worth it.

Cycling infrastructure should be better funded and better designed

I again refer the Committee to [Ben Stanley](#) and [Aaron Ball](#)’s submissions and their excellent breakdowns of how cycling infrastructure in Queensland can be improved.

I consider myself fortunate that 85 per cent of my daily commute takes place off-road. Without the Bicentennial Bikeway, I never would’ve taken up bike commuting, and without the Western Freeway-Centenary Bikeway, I wouldn’t have continued when I moved further out from the city.

Unfortunately, the 15 per cent of my trip where I am forced to share the road with cars is all that's needed to understand why bike commuter numbers aren't higher in Brisbane.

Plenty has been said about the shortcomings of Sylvan Road, and the need for better infrastructure there to remove the hazards of doorings and left and right hooks. I will focus on Sumners Road, the only other part of my commute that isn't separated from traffic.

From the pedestrian crossing that cyclists use to cross Sumners Road, the bikeway continues left from the petrol station down Centenary Motorway. However, turning right up Sumners Road, there is no separated bikeway. Instead, every afternoon I am forced to share the road with cars in order to get home.

While I appreciate that there is a cycling lane situated along this part of Sumners Road, it is the most hazardous part of my commute.

There are numerous points where left hooks are waiting to happen. Past Spine Street, parking is allowed in the "cycling lane". I have taken to diverting onto the footpath here to avoid being squeezed between drivers and parked cars, vans, a motorcycle and on some afternoons a police speed camera van. However, riding on the footpath presents the risk of a left hook.

Then there is the stretch of Sumners Road once you get to the top of the hill. Going around the corner past Centenary Tavern, cyclists are separated from drivers by nothing more than a white line.

The "cycling lane" then connects to a shared path. I appreciate that this path has been widened in recent years. I would love to use it, but I find it safer to ride on the road here for two reasons. One, at Brumby Circuit the point of crossing is located inside the bend. This makes it difficult for turning cars and cyclists to see each other, increasing the risk of a collision. Two, the path ends at Wacol Station Road, meaning any cyclist continuing up Sumners Road must either re-merge with traffic anyway or use the narrow, left-hook-prone footpath.

In the six months I have commuted along this route, I can count on one hand the number of cyclists I have seen using it.

This is a case of cycling infrastructure installed with good intentions but executed with poor understanding of cyclists' needs. There are countless other examples of this throughout the state. Government initiatives to encourage more people to commute by bike are commendable. However, bike corridors like the Western Freeway-Centenary and Bicentennial bikeways will never be utilised to their full potential until people feel they can cycle safely along the entire length of their commute.

More funding, [not less](#), must be allocated to improve existing connections and build new connections from major bike routes to outer suburbs.

Where funding has been allocated – as was heartening to see for cyclists in my area [earlier this year](#) – better design is crucial. There is no point installing on-road “cycling lanes” unless they are sufficiently separated from traffic. If cyclists are forced to navigate between parked and moving vehicles, like on Sumners Road, many people will simply deem the path too unsafe to use.

Only when cycling paths are designed with all potential hazards taken into account will cyclists use them. Until then, they will choose the road rather than the “perfectly good cycling path right next to it”.

Bicycle registration should be a non-issue

I would happily pay a registration fee if it would neutralise the argument that all cyclists are freeloaders who don’t pay road tax. I would pay as much as it would take to get better cycling infrastructure and amenities.

However, as I understand it, the costs of administering a bicycle registration scheme would be greater than any revenue collected. It would also be another disincentive to those considering taking up bike commuting.

The Committee should consider that there is a good reason there are only a very limited number of places in the world where bicycle registration is in place.

Final comments

I have recently returned from a first-time trip to Japan. The biggest culture shock I experienced was seeing how normal and acceptable cycling is to the Japanese people. In every city I visited, I saw men, women and children biking in equal numbers in everyday clothes. Drivers and pedestrians gave way to me wherever I rode, whether I was on a separated path or on the road.

The sheer number of cyclists and sheer amount of courtesy shown toward them in Japan were so far removed from Brisbane I am still having trouble readjusting two weeks after my return home.

One day, I hope the typical cycling experience in Queensland will mirror the typical cycling experience in Japan and other cycling countries. I am glad steps are being taken to increase safety for cyclists around the state. There is a long way to go to improving and normalising cycling in Queensland, but this inquiry is a promising start.

Thank you,

Yvonne Tran