Submission 99

26 July 2013
The Research Director
Transport, Housing and Local Government Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane QLD 4000

Dear Sir

Please accept my submission regarding "The enquiry into cycling issues".

In this cover letter I provide brief background information about myself in order to give context for the points raised in the attached submission.

I am a 26 year old public servant at the Queensland Department of Environment and Heritage Protection. I have a Bachelor Degree in Environmental Science.

I grew up in rural Queensland before moving to Brisbane to in 2008. I have ridden bicycles for utility, enjoyment and fitness through all phases of life including as a school student, university student and professional, in both rural and urban Queensland. Within Brisbane, I have resided in Taringa (inner city), Bracken Ridge (outer suburban) and Mitchelton (inner suburban).

Through all phases of life and through living in all of the above areas, I have ridden a bicycle due to the unrivalled utility and efficiency it offers as a mode of transport. In the submission I will discuss safety-related barriers to uptake. I believe one of the biggest issues with regard to cycling is safety to more casual cyclists; who are simply wanting to adopt cycling as a mode of transport but are uncomfortable with the current conditions. The majority of these adverse conditions can be quite comfortably fixed.

I thank you for considering my submission. Should you wish to discuss any of the points I have raised further, please do contact me via email.

Regards

Dirk van Kampen

Enquiry into Cycling Issues

How cycling safety can be improved across ALL demographics

Introduction

In this submission I outline cycling safety issues and how these are hindering cycling uptake from the general population. By this, I mean that cycling is currently a marginalised activity that, statistically, is engaged in predominately by middle aged males. I will discuss improvements which can be made to both legislation and infrastructure in order to greatly reduce the safety barriers which the average person currently faces if they wish to get on a bicycle and ride somewhere. The goal should be safety and comfort for men, women and children of all ages on a bicycle. This goal has already been achieved in places such as the Netherlands, and it was a serious focus on cycling safety for children in particular which finally drove such a positive change for this country.

I have arranged my discussion under the terms of reference for the enquiry.

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

I believe there are numerous factors which influence trends in bicycle injuries and fatalities involving motor vehicles.

Mandatory Helmet Laws

Some quick research will show that there is little evidence of a causal relationship between the introduction of mandatory helmet laws in Australia and any decline in head injuries. Mandatory Helmet Laws have only really been shown to produce one clear outcome: reduce numbers of people cycling and therefore reduce the overall presence of cyclists. A reduced overall presence of cyclists leads to reduced awareness by motorists, increased marginalisation, and decreased safety. I would submit that the majority of people wanting to ride a bicycle are not planning to ride fast or dangerously, and this negates the need for protective headwear. This is analogous to regular people driving vehicles not being required to wear the head protection required of racing drivers.

Lack of Serious, Usable, Connected Cycling Infrastructure

An analogy can be drawn when comparing a person casually riding a bike on a footpath or quiet street to a person wearing full lycra clothing and a helmet on their head. This is very much like the comparison between a person casually driving a car for transportation purposes and a racing driver in a specifically built machine in a full body suit and full-face helmet. I draw this analogy because currently, the serious, sporting cyclists are the only sub-group which are thriving. This is due to this sub-group having the fitness and interest in engaging in a reasonably extreme sport of riding a bicycle around fast-moving traffic. It needs to be acknowledged that, while the majority of people who do not currently cycle would like to take it up, these people wish to ride a bicycle comfortably and safely, and not in such extreme conditions.

Brisbane has some exemplary cycling infrastructure, however until these pieces of infrastructure are connected, it will not see a serious level of use. It should be an absolute priority to find ways of making direct, fully connected cycling routes to maximise value achieved from the money that has

already been invested in cycling infrastructure. This is the primary factor which has driven safety improvements and cycling uptake by the masses in other parts of the world.

On-street car parking

On-street car parking presents a serious safety hazard to cyclists. On the majority of streets, there is a shoulder in which a bicycle can safely be ridden. Unfortunately, what is also on the majority of these streets is an overabundance of parked vehicles.

Parked cars present a hazard to cyclists not only by forcing them into the path of moving traffic, but also by the unexpected opening of doors of parked cars into the path of cyclists. Many cyclists have been injured or killed in this way.

Removing on street car parking and using this space to create safe, separated two-way cycle paths would not only be a cost-effective way of introducing direct, safe cycle commuting routes, but also would actually vastly reduce the demand for on street parking. If cycling is a simple, viable option for all, it most certainly leads to a reduction in the number of vehicles people feel they are required to own and store.

Finally, one practice which can be quickly and almost immediately stopped is cars parking in painted, on-street bike lanes. This represents an incredible waste of value. If resources are being spent on setting aside space and paint for on-street bike lanes, they must be free of cars and debris, and also not run out in unsafe locations.

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;

Review of speed limits

Cycling infrastructure cannot cover all areas of any centre. Therefore, more thought should be given to the role in which quiet, urban streets can play in offering transport routes for the average person riding a bicycle. There have been some attempts at this in Brisbane with the introduction of “Bicycle Awareness Zones”, however these are all too often on narrow, winding streets with vehicles travelling at least 50km/h.

The greater the speed differential between a cyclist and a vehicle, the greater the potential is for both injury, and the greater the severity of the injury will be. There is no need for vehicles to travel along most streets at speeds of more than 30kmh. A typical trip from A to B in an urban area rarely involves an average speed of more than 30kmh in any case.

Reducing speed limits of most urban streets would remove the incentive for rat-running, massively increase the safety of anyone utilising the streets for walking and cycling, and increase amenity for anyone living nearby through not having to endure the noise associated with vehicles accelerating and decelerating so wildly. While I advocate reduction in speed limits in urban streets, I believe there is room to offset these reductions by speed limit increases on certain roadways, particularly

highways and freeways. Increasing speed limits in these areas would make a reduction in speed limits in urban areas a far easier political sell.

Allowing cycling on footpaths

Queensland has exemplary laws when it comes to allowing cyclists to ride along footpaths. Given the current adverse conditions which a person faces if they attempt to ride a bicycle down many roads, the option to ride slowly along a footpath presents the opportunity for a cyclist to avoid busy, dangerous sections of road. Indeed, I utilise a few kilometres of footpath out of my total 12km one-way commute where there would be no other practicable option than to ride along a six lane arterial road.

It must be said that while I believe allowing cycling on footpaths is good, it is only preferable as a "stop-gap" method of improving cyclist safety. I acknowledge there is still some level of risk associated with riding on a footpath, mostly associated with vehicles reversing out of driveways. Other measures such as reductions in speed limits on most streets and better connectivity of bike paths present a vastly preferable option than to cyclists resorting to footpaths to protect themselves from vehicles.

1m rule

The primary benefit of introducing a minimum passing distance rule would be as a deterrent for the sort of aggressive, over-entitled driver behaviour which is unfortunately seen all too often. I would argue that despite any concerns relating to enforceability of the rule, this rule would be of enormous benefit in situations where an investigation is occurring into a collision between a vehicle and a cyclist. Currently, when drivers injure or kill cyclists as a result of attempting too close a pass, the driver does not suffer much of a penalty. Introduction of a minimum passing distance would be of enormous benefit to all cyclists who ride on roads.

The potential benefits and impacts of bicycle registration

Unlike the overwhelming weight of evidence worldwide of the benefits of non-mandatory helmets, some quick research will reveal that of the extreme few bicycle registration schemes in the world, none have produced any safety benefits for cyclists. Bicycle registration would be administratively costly with no chance of recovering these costs. Furthermore, like mandatory helmet laws, bicycle registration would just be one more inconvenience to casual cycling, which would negatively influence cyclist numbers and therefore negatively influence safety.

Conclusion

Under the points above, I have discussed issues which I believe are related to the enquiry on cycling safety in the context of making conditions safe for ALL members of the community to cycle. Encouraging utility cycling of all ages is immensely empowering to individuals and has profound benefits to transport efficiency, community physical health, mental health and the social fabric.