

Shared paths – finding solutions

Position statement and recommendations

Cycling ridership is growing very quickly and shared walking and cycling paths are the most common form of off-road cycling facility in Australia. Some shared paths are carrying very high numbers of cyclists and for some council areas shared paths are their busiest cycling routes.

Victoria Walks has significant reservations regarding shared paths and how they impact walking, particularly by more vulnerable walkers. Generally, slow moving recreational cyclists may be able to share paths with walkers. However, walkers do not generally mix well with commuter or sports cyclists, who typically travel at higher speed.

The Australian guidelines on this issue are overseen by Austroads, the association of Australasian road transport and traffic agencies. It recommends building shared paths when pedestrian and cyclist volumes are low (each less than 10 per hour), or when the pedestrian volume is low and cyclist speeds are below 20km/h.¹

This position paper is based on *Shared Paths – the issues*, a comprehensive research paper produced by Victoria Walks in March 2015. It included a literature review and stakeholder consultation with subject experts, VicRoads and 18 local councils.



The issues, the facts

Cyclists and Walkers

Walking is the most popular form of leisure related physical activity in the Victorian population and at the same time, cycling ridership is growing very quickly in Victoria (9.5% increase between 2013 and 2014)². This, combined with the fact that shared paths are a popular choice for off-road cyclists, has resulted in a significant problem starting to emerge.

“Almost three-quarters of recreational paths on the Metropolitan Trail Network, originally intended for leisure and low levels of transport use, now have high levels of transport use.”³

Councils and other agencies have provided shared paths in good faith, in order to encourage walking and cycling, but some paths have exceeded expectations for cycling. At the extreme, the Main Yarra Trail/Capital City Trail records 811 riders per hour in the peak.²

Recent evidence suggests that shared paths can be particularly hazardous for cyclists. For example, a study of cycling crashes in ACT found 36% were on shared paths.⁴ However the safety issues for walkers on shared paths do not appear to have been assessed by quality research – a significant gap given that shared paths are common infrastructure.

“There is substantial evidence of the incompatibility of cyclists and motor vehicles but little to justify shifting the risk to shared paths where similar incompatibility exists between pedestrians and cyclists...”⁴



1 Austroads (2009). *Guide to Road Design Part 6A: Pedestrian and Cyclist Paths*.
2 Bicycle Network (2014). *Super Tuesday Bike Commuter Survey*, Victoria 2014.
3 State of Victoria (2012). *Cycling into the Future 2013-23, Victoria's Cycling Strategy*.
4 De Rome, L; Boufous, S; Georgeson, T; Senserrick, T; Richardson, D; and Ivers, R (2014). 'Bicycle crashes in different riding environments in the Australian Capital Territory.' *Traffic Injury Prevention* 2014;15(1):81-8.

“Shared paths and cycle use of footpaths is the most common mode of providing cycle facilities in Australia, but European (including UK and Ireland) guidelines stress the importance of separating the two wherever possible.”⁵

Cyclists generally travel faster on shared paths than the 20 km/h envisaged in the Austroads guidelines. While cycling speed varies significantly between locations and users, average cycling speed on shared paths typically ranges between 20 and 30 km/h.

Controlling cyclist speed is problematic. Bicycles are not registered, speed limits are not legally enforceable and physical measures to control cycling speed may present a hazard to cyclists, so have seldom been used.

Consistent with broader ‘safe system’ approaches to road safety, we should not rely exclusively on managing behaviour, especially when our capacity to do this is limited. Appropriate provision of infrastructure should be the starting point.

Both walkers and cyclists prefer segregated or separated paths, when user numbers are high. While cyclists generally prefer shared paths to riding on the road, in a survey of over 600 Victorian cyclists, 66% said they ‘really like’ riding on a segregated path, compared to 7% for a shared path.⁶

Vulnerable members of our community

Walkers who are elderly or vision impaired are particularly vulnerable and uncomfortable sharing with cyclists. For older seniors, footpaths are critical to their personal mobility and their capacity to lead active, independent lives. For those aged 75 and over, walking makes up 77% of their total physical activity.

In a survey of 1,128 Victorians aged 60 or over, 39% identified bicycle riders on shared paths as a moderate or major constraint to their walking. Better cyclist behaviour and reduced cycling speed on shared paths were the top two responses for action that would make walking feel safer.⁷

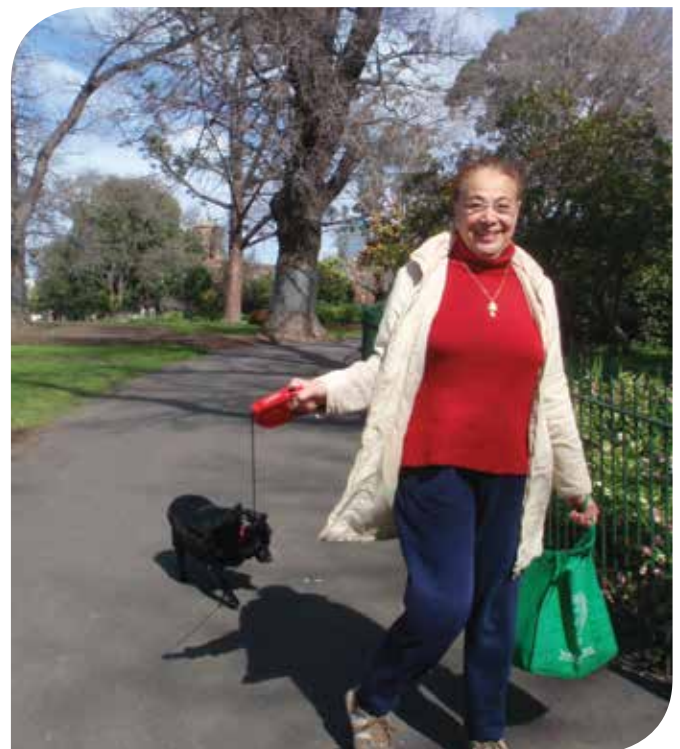
In a survey of 607 Victorians with vision impairment, 8% had been involved in a collision and 20% were in a near collision as a pedestrian over the previous five years and 24% of these incidents were with bicycle riders.⁸

Understanding the Guidelines

The requirement for cyclists to give way to pedestrians on shared paths is not well understood. Initial findings from the VicRoads Cycling Road Rules Survey 2014 indicate that this is one of three rules that many people “are unaware of or unclear about,” compared to other rules.⁹ Related to this, shared paths are often described as ‘bike paths,’ even by local authorities.

There is a clear conflict between the Austroads guidelines and VicRoads *Cycle Notes 21*, which does not definitively recommend separated facilities unless cyclist volumes are extremely high – greater than 600 per hour.

“World best practice emphasises that bicycles belong on the road, or on segregated facilities provided specifically for them... Forcing walkers and cyclists to share a path should only be contemplated as a last resort, when no other solution is possible.”¹⁰



5 Austroads (2006). *Pedestrian-Cyclist Conflict Minimisation on Shared Paths and Footpaths*.

6 CDM Research (2012). ‘Cyclist Route Choice Survey,’ unpublished report to VicRoads.

7 Garrard, J (2013). *Senior Victorians and Walking: obstacles and opportunities*. Victoria Walks.

8 Oxley, J; Liu, S; Langford, J; Bleechmore, M; and Guaglio, A (2012). *Road Safety for Pedestrians Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision*. Monash University Accident Research Centre and Vision Australia.

9 Minister for Roads (2014). ‘Be safer on Ride2Work Day by knowing the road rules,’ media release issued 14 October 2014, Hon Terry Mulder MP.

10 Tolley, R (2008). *Safe Priority Walking and Cycling Routes in Greater Bendigo*, report to City of Greater Bendigo, March 2008.

Finding solutions

Road managers should aim to provide separated paths or safe on-road conditions for cyclists and footpaths for walkers, with shared paths only for low levels of cycling.

Separated paths are standard practice in nations with strong cycling cultures, such as the Netherlands.

In consultation with councils, many agreed that separation of walkers and cyclists was preferable where there were high numbers of users. However councils were conscious of the cost of separated facilities and several suggested that in many cases they may not be practical, due to limited space or fixed limitations such as rocks or trees.

“Separation also allows cyclists to maintain more comfortable speeds, reduces the potential for conflict between cyclists and pedestrians and improves the level of service for pedestrians, especially elderly pedestrians or those with a disability.”¹¹

Improving cycling safety on the road as an alternative to shared paths must be considered. The UK guidance on shared paths includes a decision-making framework starting with the question “Would it be feasible and desirable to improve conditions for cyclists on the road?” If the answer is yes, the response is that shared paths are not appropriate and on-road improvements should be designed.¹²

Local councils are under increasing financial pressure. Paths that are over capacity are typically serving cycling commuters, who are likely to travel through more than one municipality. Councils that find themselves at the crossroads of major cycling routes should not be held accountable for the costs of maintaining and upgrading that infrastructure. State government should fund replacement of busy shared paths with separated paths or other facilities.

While separated paths are preferable, it is clear that shared paths will continue to be a significant form of infrastructure provision for cyclists and walkers. Therefore, efforts need to be made to establish a

¹¹ Queensland Department of Transport and Main Roads (2014). *Calculating the widths of shared paths and separated bicycle paths*, technical note under development, April 2014.

¹² Department for Transport (2012). *Shared Use Routes for Pedestrians and Cyclists*, Local Transport Note 1/12, United Kingdom, September 2012.



culture of sharing by users, consistent with applicable road rules, and shared paths should be low speed. They were envisaged as low speed environments, but it appears this has not been effectively communicated to cyclists.

Victoria Walks Position

Existing urban areas

- Shared paths with high volumes of cyclists (more than 50 per hour in the commuter peak) should be identified for separation/segregation; or consider options where cyclists can safely ride on roads.
- Where existing shared paths cannot be separated/segregated, public education and signage should aim to:
 - Establish a culture of sharing paths by users
 - Emphasise shared paths should be low speed; and that cyclists are legally required to give way to walkers (public awareness of this is low).
- Road managers should avoid converting footpaths to shared paths, as they may be ‘designing out’ the most vulnerable road users – older walkers and those with a disability.

New Suburbs

- In new suburbs, cyclists should be provided with dedicated cycling paths or safe on-road cycling conditions and walkers with footpaths, rather than shared paths.

Shared paths are very much a second best option for cyclists and especially for walkers. Community health and wellbeing is now a significant issue that needs to be addressed, particularly where shared paths have high numbers of commuter or sports cyclists.

¹³ Quote from member of a focus group of Victorian seniors, in Garrard, J (2013). *Senior Victorians and Walking: obstacles and opportunities*. Victoria Walks.

“They [cyclists] go ‘whoosh’ as they go past, and often the paths aren’t very wide, so this notion that you have to share has to come with more thought. If there’s not enough room it’s not a good match. If it’s got to be shared it’s got to be wider. Or separation between them.”¹³



“In order to minimise conflict, holistic solutions are needed where conditions are improved for cyclists and/or pedestrians but not for one at the expense of the other.”⁵

Summary recommendations

1. VicRoads should revise *Cycle Notes 21* (perhaps as a ‘shared path note’) to be consistent with Austroads guidelines and more strongly encourage separated facilities.
2. Subject to the results of further research, guidelines should recommend segregated or separated facilities where numbers of walkers exceed 100 or cyclists exceed 50 per hour in the commuter peak which generally aligns with the Austroads, Norwegian and Dutch guidance. The number of pedestrians is higher, but the recent work in Australia has established that cyclists can comfortably accommodate 100-110 pedestrians per hour.
3. VicRoads should commission research on:
 - a. Walker perceptions of shared paths, including levels of tolerance for volumes and speed of cyclists, and appropriate shared path etiquette (i.e. ringing of bells) to assist in revising *Cycle Notes 21*.
 - b. User experience of collision, falls and injury on shared paths, including falls caused by near misses, incorporating survey of shared path users.
4. VicRoads should review the *Shared Path Audit Guidelines* to better consider collision risk and reduce the reliance on good cycling behaviour to overcome infrastructure limitations.
5. VicRoads should commission trials of options to limit cyclist speed on shared paths, as identified in the detailed research paper.
6. Shared paths should be designed, managed and promoted with 20 km/h or less envisaged as the desired cycling speed.
7. Road management agencies should lower vehicle speed limits on non-arterial roads or where there are high numbers of cyclists or walkers, to provide good conditions for transport cycling, as recommended by UK guidance.
8. Road management agencies should adopt a hierarchy of cycling provision as set out in UK guidance. Conversion of existing footpaths to shared paths or construction of a shared path in place of a footpath along a street should be a ‘last resort’ option and avoided where possible.
9. Councils and other agencies responsible for shared paths should undertake periodic monitoring to identify locations where existing shared paths do not meet design standards for current volumes of cyclists and/or walkers.
10. The Victorian Government should fund an education and signage program to promote a positive culture of sharing space, emphasise shared paths are low speed and that cyclists are legally required to give way to walkers.
11. The Victorian Government should establish a fund to provide for upgrading shared paths or creating segregated/separated facilities.
12. Clause 56.06 of the Victoria Planning Provisions should be amended to require separated cycling paths rather than shared paths on connector and arterial roads in growth areas.

For a complete analysis of the issues around shared paths and full recommendations read our research paper, *Shared Paths – the issues* at www.victoriawalks.org.au/position_statements

