



December 2015

## Background evidence – footpath cycling

VicRoads has been undertaking a review of Victorian cycling related road rules and legislation. They are considering two rule changes in particular that are of great concern to Victoria Walks, Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victoria and Vision Australia:

1. Allow cyclists over 16 years to ride on the footpath when carrying a child under 10 years in a trailer.
2. Allow riders 12-17 years to ride on a footpath if they are accompanying a rider under 12 years of age.

Footpaths, by definition, are designed for pedestrians. Footpaths are critical for many seniors, people with a vision impairment or other disability to access shops, services, participate in their community and lead their daily lives. They are our most vulnerable road users and it is paramount that they are safe and *feel* safe when walking on footpaths.

The evidence shows that footpath cycling increases risks and barriers to the mobility of those dependent on walking to participate in their community.

The evidence also shows that cycling on footpaths is not safer for cyclists than riding on the road.

This paper explains why Victoria Walks, COTA Victoria and Vision Australia oppose the proposed changes.

Victoria Walks strongly supports initiatives to make cycling safer and more attractive. We need to support cycling with dedicated bike infrastructure and by making it safer to ride on the road.

*“Instead of feeling safe on a footpath people are not, because if you deviate from a straight line, you might be collected by a bike, or subjected to their anger or abuse.” (Senior Victorian, quoted in Garrard 2013)*

### Bicycle trailers and pedestrians

Bicycle trailers are heavy, wide, cumbersome and can be difficult to manoeuvre and stop, particularly in environments for which they were not designed, such as footpaths. Many footpaths are narrow or poorly maintained with overhanging or encroaching vegetation and permanent or temporary obstacles (signs, poles, utility boxes, bins, rubbish, vehicles etc.). The national guidelines for the minimum width for shared walking and cycling paths is 2.5 metres, which is much wider than the vast majority of footpaths.

Where paths are legally shared, conflicts are common between pedestrians and bicyclists. Walkers can, and often do, change their speed and direction almost instantaneously. Footpath environments are even less suitable to share as bicyclists would not have sufficient reaction time or space to avoid collisions. The size of a bicycle trailer can be quite imposing and take up nearly the entire width of the average footpath. It would be difficult, if not impossible, for a rider with a trailer to give way to walkers (as they would legally be required to do) on a narrow footpath. Inevitably walkers would be forced off the footpath when they encountered a rider with a trailer.

It is important to recognise that, while trailers might be designed for children, they are towed by adults who are able to make judgements and informed decisions about where it is safe to ride or not.

### Allowing riders 12-17 years to ride on a footpath to accompany a rider under 12

The purpose of adults accompanying children under 12 years to ride on footpaths is to supervise and teach them road rules and safe riding.

The Road Rules state that a rider over 18 years may accompany a child under 12 years riding a bicycle on the footpath when “the child is under the rider's Supervision’ (Rule 250: 1A). This supervisory function is further articulated in VicRoads’ bike education resources: “[c]hildren under 12 years of

age may ride on the footpath, and so too can adults if they are supervising bicycle riders under the age of 12”.

The proposed Road Rule modification would result in a significant functional change from an adult who supervises and educates to a teenager who simply accompanies. This is not appropriate as teenagers lack adult maturity and research indicates they exhibit risk taking behaviour. This is recognised by Bicycle Network, the organisation leading the push to increase the age for footpath cycling: “students up to the age of 16 are much more likely to take risks adults wouldn’t when riding” (Bicycle Network 2015).

Vulnerable pedestrians in particular should not have to contend with teenagers’ risk taking behaviour on footpaths and it is not appropriate for teenagers to be responsible for children’s road safety education, particularly when they may not provide good role modelling of safe behaviours.

If teenagers were allowed to ride on the footpath when accompanying younger children, enforcing the law would be more complicated and it would be difficult to stop teenagers from cycling on footpaths more generally.

### Older and vision impaired walkers sharing with cyclists

Dr Jan Garrard’s 2013 Seniors Walking Study and subsequent report *Senior Victorians and Walking: Obstacles and Opportunities*, demonstrates that walking is critical for senior Victorians to live healthy, independent lives. For those aged 75 and over, walking makes up 77% of their total physical activity. And as seniors get older, their walking is increasingly about everyday life needs, with shopping or personal business the reason for 81% of walking trips by those aged over 80.

The study included a survey of 1,128 senior Victorians and “bicycle riders on shared walking and cycling paths” was rated a moderate or major constraint to walking by 39% of respondents.

When asked what measures could impact their feelings of safety when walking, the top two responses were:

1. Better cyclist behaviour on shared paths
2. Reduce cycling speed on shared paths.

Pedestrians who are blind or have low vision are at particular risk of collision with a cyclist. 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 5 years. A quarter (24.1%) of these collisions or near collisions were with bicycles (Oxley et al 2012).

There is significant concern that pedestrians who are blind or have low vision might be deterred from using footpaths altogether if there are further increases in footpath cycling.

### Cycling risks to pedestrians

Unsurprisingly, cycling is not a significant contributing factor to pedestrian deaths, but cycling does cause pedestrian injury.

Whilst it might be hoped that cyclists would reduce their speed when using footpaths or shared paths, this does not appear to be the case. One study in the Sydney region found that average cycling speeds on footpaths (21 km/h) were exactly the same as on roads with a speed limit of 50 km/h or less (Grzebieta et al 2011).

A study of crashes by cyclists in NSW found 5.1% involved collision with a pedestrian (Poulos et al, 2015) and a similar study in ACT found 6.4% involved collision with a pedestrian (De Rome et al 2014).

### Footpath risks to cyclists

Evidence suggests that cycling on the footpath is actually more dangerous than cycling on the roadway:

- In the ACT, where cycling is allowed on footpaths, a study of cycling crashes found that 17% were on the footpath, with the authors concluding that cyclists would be safer riding in traffic (De Rome et al 2014).
- A study in NSW estimated that the crash rate for cyclists on the footpath was 5.6 times that of cyclists on the road and the injury rate was 4.5 times greater (Poulos et al, 2015).
- A comprehensive literature review of European and North American research found “Most studies that considered sidewalk-riding suggested that it is particularly hazardous for cyclists, with estimates of 1.8 to 16 times the risk of cycling on-road” (Reynolds et al 2009).

There may be particular safety risks for young cyclists in treating pedestrian infrastructure as cycling infrastructure:

- In a NSW study of crashes affecting child cyclists and child pedestrians, 37% of the cycling collisions occurred on a pedestrian crossing. Often the child had been riding on the footpath and in 57% of the cycling crashes at crossings the child was riding across the pedestrian crossing (Styles and Cairney 2004).
- A study of cycling crashes in Victoria found “Almost one in five fatal cycle crashes (16%) involved a cyclist, usually young, riding off a footpath (DCA 147) or driveway (DCA 148) onto the road. This type of crash also accounts for 18.2% of all cycle crashes. Most (63%) of the fatalities in this group are under 15 and male.” (Bicycle Victoria 2002)

Riding on the footpath may be perceived as safer, but this is a false sense of security.

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