

INQUIRY INTO VULNERABLE ROAD USERS

Organisation: Private Citizen
Name: Mr Phillip Edwards
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Dear Committee,

I have been a commuting cyclist for 20 years and a motorbike rider for 6. I have been driving a car for 29 years. Even though motorbikes are fast and only have 2 wheels, of these 3 transport modes cycling is the one that I feel poses the biggest threat to my safety. The primary cause of the danger inherent in cycling is not the fact that you're on 2 wheels without the protection of a "cage". Motorbikes have just as little protection as a bicycle (though a greater propensity for serious injury due to the speeds involved). I believe the reason for the added danger to cyclists is driver attitude.

Australians have traditionally been in love with big, fast cars and up until the last 10 years or so have been used to unfettered access to relatively quiet roads. A large proportion of drivers are simply unprepared to share "their" roads with anyone who might get in their way. Motorbikes do not get in their way. Bicycles do. I find that a frighteningly large number of drivers go out of their way to act aggressively towards cyclists and, knowingly or not, put cyclists very lives at risk.

While there are many things that can be done to physical road infrastructure to improve safety for cyclists, the most important thing is to change the driving culture of Australians to recognise that the 21st century will see many different modes of transport on our roads, and everyone has to share the space and respect other users. Current driver behaviour is totally unacceptable and is unfortunately allowed to continue unchecked because of a culture of blaming cyclists for "being on the road in the 1st place".

When a group of 60 cyclists were injured by Hassan Bakr in May 2008 on Southern Cross Drive the punishment was a paltry \$1200 fine. Sadly the NSW Roads & Traffic Minister at the time tacitly laid the blame on the cyclists by saying that it was "not helpful to ride in peak-hour traffic" even though they were lawfully allowed to be there. If the Roads Minister thinks it's OK to treat cyclists this way, then what sort of message does that send? A similar case in California resulted in the driver being sentenced with 5 years in prison (see <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/jan/09/local/la-me-cyclists9-2010jan09>).

Cultural change needs to come "from the top" with prominent NSW politicians and identities leading the way. I would like to see proper awareness campaigns put in place to change the Australian mindset towards cycling (and I don't mean a "Watch out for cyclists" logo on the back of a rego sticker).

Tougher penalties for injuring other road users need to be mandated and reckless and negligent drivers brought to justice. People need to understand the impact on people's lives of their dangerous driving and attitudes, and that our roads really are for sharing.

The benefits of cycling to individuals and the wider community should be promoted as part of the cultural shift.

And if drivers attitudes won't budge until cyclists "pay their way too", then implement a cycling road tax. Most of the cyclists I have spoken to about this would gladly pay a reasonable amount as the price for buying their legitimacy to be on the road. There are of course, administrative perils associated with this but perhaps it could be levied through existing bodies such as Bicycle NSW who also provide public indemnity insurance as part of the membership.