

## INQUIRY INTO VULNERABLE ROAD USERS

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## Submission to the Vulnerable Road users Inquiry

1<sup>st</sup> August 2010

I recently listened to an interview with Sebastian Junger, the director of a documentary, 'Restrepo', chronicling the year-long posting of a platoon of soldiers in an isolated but strategic valley in Afghanistan. He talked in depth about his varied and often unsettling experiences in situ with the platoon. A comment he made resonated with me;

"Every trip I did out there with those guys...something bad almost happened to me".

The comment and his thought on the isolation echoed when I learned of the Vulnerable Road Users Inquiry, because in many ways, it's a similar feeling to those I have when contemplating my daily 25-minute bicycle commute to and-from work in the heart of Sydney.

I live in Kingsford and part of the route to the city is via Anzac Avenue, which is framed on one side by a cycleway. That's both the easiest and safest section of my commute; the one I look forward to each day. Sadly, the remainder of my journey is on shared roads, which, in Sydney, are fraught with danger:

- Car doors opening without a thought of the potential hazard to cyclists
- Drivers passing too close and/or too fast
- Grooves and ridges in roads that can play havoc with bicycle steering and stability
- Vehicles pulling out from parked positions or across intersections without due consideration
- Drivers approaching immediately behind when there is no room for them to pass in the often narrow lanes

My commute is not long, but not one I would recommend to anyone. Indeed when other bike riders are making their way through traffic ahead, I am reminded of the ever-present danger in which I place myself.

To travel by quieter and much safer routes, avoiding main roads and busy intersections would add perhaps 30 - 45 minutes to the journey, which would make it much less perilous but also much less appealing, when a bus ride takes about the same as my current commute.

My experience is not lost upon my fellow commuters who, from their cars, stuck in traffic jams or as bus riders crammed in, would not – as I'm reliably informed at other times - even consider changing places.

Apart from the usual "it's too cold in winter/ hot in summer", the primary reason non-bike commuters tell me for not cycling is the lack of safety or more pragmatically the risk of loss of life. Some of the comments are from mountain bikers who will happily ride precarious off-road tracks that by comparison seem much safer to them than Sydney roads.

Until Sydney commits to bicycle commuting routes which are contiguous, separated, well signposted, and on well-maintained concrete or asphalt, routed along main arterials with safe intersection crossings joining them, cycle commuting is highly unlikely to gain significant traction beyond a minority of confident young (and mostly male) cyclists.

The same lack of dedicated cycling infrastructure is failing to protect children who might otherwise want to cycle to school. Protective parents instead transport them by car allowing them to form early habits of short car journeys, leading to an almost total reliance on cars in their teens and adulthood, when a bike would more than suffice, providing fitness, independence and ease for short journeys.

Lack of signage and cycleway traffic lights, road markings and infrastructure in Sydney commuting all support the very real feeling of isolation that commuter cyclists have, that we are not wanted by either pedestrians on pavements or by car drivers on roadways. Sydney's commuters will continue to resist cycle commuting due to a lack of government, cultural and legal respect. Indeed the lip-service by transport officials towards cycling belies their true funding commitment to the sustained growth of the almighty car. It is sad that NSW has failed to learn what many other cities already have, that a focus on safe, high-quality cycle infrastructure pays long-term dividends across the whole of society.

Separated cycleways like the M7 and Burwood, are great examples of what can be achieved with forethought and planning and excellent cycling leadership all of which, in NSW cycling policy today seem to be sorely lacking.

Grant Shatford

1<sup>st</sup> August 2010