

Submission to NZTA on Safety Panel Draft Report

Key points-

- Significant increases in cycling and walking -as distinct from safe cycling among existing cyclists- is extremely urgent for Kiwis' health.
- The Report is highly commendable in its thinking and recommendations.
- It doesn't have the mandate to recommend all the necessary promotional measures -legal, educational, infrastructural, etc.- to get more Kiwis on bikes.
- Its most useful recommendation is that high-level leadership is needed -but that should be for the promotion of increased cycling generally, not just for safety of existing cyclists.
- A higher-level body than the NZTA should be responsible for this promotion, ideally an inter-departmental body, implementing a considered and detailed national policy with adequate funding and realistic timelines.
- The detailed recommendations of the Report relating to road safety are generally excellent. Legislation for safe overtaking clearances and application of lower speed limits would be very welcome for New Zealand cyclists.

Dear NZTA,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on the important topic of cycling safety. I write as a long-time advocate for cycling both in New Zealand and the EU, as a member of Bicycle Nelson Bays advocacy group, and as a resident of Nelson, cycling here since 1995.

Introduction

'Physical inactivity is the new smoking', health promotion specialists are now saying¹. Almost 1 in 3 New Zealand adults are obese, and a further 34% are overweight².

Meanwhile, 49% of Kiwis' trips to work are 5km or less⁵ -easily short enough to be done by bike- but 74% of work trips are done by car. Tragically, the statistics for our kids' journeys to school are equally bad. This is sadly reflected in the Report- 'Almost everyone in New Zealand over 40 years old can remember when the bike sheds at their school were full. Now there are only a few schools with bike sheds and even fewer of these are full' (p. 9).

So the effective promotion of cycling, and active transport in general, is a CRITICALLY URGENT PRIORITY

for New Zealand. This promotion needs to include all the measures available to increase cycling- public advertising, legal changes, tax adjustments, education, as well as construction of cycling facilities.

Unfortunately few initiatives to curb sedentary transport have been made in the past decade.

Context and scope of the Report

As the Report says, cycling in New Zealand is relatively safe (p. 9). The necessity of a report on cycling safety is debatable in that context; the necessity of improving the PERCEIVED safety of cycling, and how to accelerate cycling uptake, is undoubted.

As required by the Panel's original brief, the recommendation overview on page 8 restrains itself to safety in real terms (that of existing cyclists). This should be revised to recommend clearly that public promotion & education about the actual safety, and the many benefits of cycling, must also be a priority.

This raises the point that there is a difference between the promotion of cycling -effecting increases to cycling modal share- and the promotion of safe cycling. It begs the question, if the urgency of promoting active transport is acknowledged, is the scope of the Panel broad enough? The Report mentions the 'safety in numbers' effect⁶. In the 'Cycling in New Zealand' section it agrees (p. 11) that HAVING MORE PEOPLE CYCLING [my emphasis] is the most reliable way to achieve safer cycling. So, a greater emphasis on the desirability –and urgency- of increasing cycling numbers is needed. The enormous opportunity cost to New Zealand resulting from Government's failure to take leadership should be highlighted.

Further, the scope does not extend to setting long-term goals for uptake of cycling, saying only that this is desirable (p. 11) and should be measured (p. 38) but it is arguable that a higher-level body must be established to set such goals and monitor outcomes.

Given the crucial role of active transport in the health-promotion field -not to mention its potential to improve carbon emission and other environmental indicators- it is questionable whether the NZTA is the appropriate body to administer the promotion of cycling (rather than just safe cycling among existing users). A higher-level body, involving Ministries of Health, Environment and Transport, administering a detailed national strategy, may be more appropriate and effective (p. 10). Treasury involvement would also be relevant. Such a national body would ideally set uptake goals for modal share of all journeys, commuter journeys, goals for roll-out of school skills training and would be responsible for monitoring progress. Many countries have set out such national strategies.

Fiscally, it seems logical that, if New Zealand sets a modest goal of making cycling e.g. 5% of all trips, then 5% of all transport funding should be allocated IMMEDIATELY to cycling measures, in view of the financial savings accruable to Treasury in the near future. Savings attributable to a 5% modal share have been estimated at \$193 million per annum¹⁰. It's important to note that improvements in health outcomes appear extremely quickly: As soon as physical activity increases, cardiovascular health improves¹¹. Again, it takes a high-level body to implement such large-scale improvements in policy.

Merely constructing cycle lanes -which will inevitably link at some point with routes of motor traffic- in the absence of the necessary changes in road-user education or promotion can paradoxically lead to a LESS safe environment for cyclists. Building segregated routes also has a potential to reinforce the misconception that 'roads belong to cars' which in turn increases a barrier to cycling uptake.

Thus, the prospect of Government's recently-announced \$100 million fund being spent on the sort of poorly-designed infrastructure being built to date, without the corresponding necessary measures to educate road users and update the driver test and licensed motorists, might ironically be a very mixed one for cyclists. Nelsonians have discovered this recently on construction of the popular but problematic Vincent Street scheme.

Specific comments on the Report

Cycling in New Zealand

The well-informed discussion on Copenhagen and the Netherlands, and the statements on the inextricability of safety and participation, do not fully feed into the Report's final recommendations, which are confined to the safety of existing cyclists (though of course if implemented in full they would certainly help the growth of cycling) rather than the promotion of cycling generally.

Safe System Approach- Safe Roads and Roadsides

The recommendation to evaluate roundabout design (p. 22) is commendable. Recommendation i. on this page is of interest for us in Nelson, in the context of proposals for Rocks Road.

Safe System Approach- Safe Speed

The initiative to reduce speed limits (p. 26) is very commendable, but doesn't sufficiently emphasise the main reason for the desirability of 30 km/h limits⁹ - this is the threshold above which collisions are known to be far more likely to be fatal (since the human body has evolved to survive impacts at about fast running speed). Specific mention of 30 km/h in this context would strengthen the document.

Safe System Approach- Safe Road Use, Safe Vehicles

Discussion of the enforceability and co-benefits of overtaking clearance (passing distance) regulation (p. 27) is informative and useful, and the recommendation to legislate for safe clearances is to be strongly supported. But the introductory section on p. 26 fails to mention cyclists' sensation of fear caused by close overtaking, which is a major contributor to the perception of cycling as being more unsafe than it really is: being overtaken at close quarters by a fast loud vehicle is extremely frightening, but rear-end collisions in open-road situations are relatively rare. California has passed similar state-wide legislation in the last month, and begun a driver education process to ensure that drivers understand that they may not overtake until a safe clearance is available.

Given the document has a whole section entitled 'Cycling Safety and Participation are Inextricable', and that the Panel is, presumably, well aware of evidence that removing choice around helmet-wearing suppresses cycling uptake, some serious discussion on the potential benefits of reintroducing choice in helmet-wearing, however limited, ought logically to be included (p. 34).

Quick and widespread 'Bikes in Schools' expansion would be a major step forward (p. 29).

The recommendation to heighten the priority of safe road sharing in the Road Strategy, and to alter driving test questions, is to be applauded (p. 31).

The initiative to expand the remit of OSH to road use would be a significant contributor to safety (p. 32).

Analysis of any road user regulations (p. 33) which have evolved to cater poorly for cyclists is a good recommendation.

Evaluation and Monitoring

This should be closely monitored by a high-level national body as mentioned in 'context and scope' above.

Conclusion

The Report within its scope is highly commendable, forward-thinking and practical.

It should expand its scope, and/or its mandate ought to be expanded, beyond the safety of existing cyclists to include the vigorous promotion of cycling as a transport mode, thus enabling 'safety in numbers' effects, as

its own introduction points out.

It should emphasise more strongly the necessity and usefulness of national-level political will, and the potential gains for politicians from the 'easy wins' of widespread cycling uptake with all its co-benefits.

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Notes-

[1 Public Health England, 'Everybody Active, Every Day', 2014. PHE no. 2014319, p. 8]

[2 New Zealand Ministry of Health annual survey 2012/13]

[3 Health of New Zealand Adults 2011-12]

[4 Lal et al Aust NZ J Public Health. 2012; 36:550-6]

[5 Statistics NZ]

[6 UK Active Report, 2011 S. 2.4 et al]

[7 ECF- 'National Investments in Cycling', 2012]

[8 OECD]

[9 Vagverket - Swedish Road Safety Agency (2003)]

[10 Alistair Woodward, Graeme Lindsay, Alex Macmillan; School of Population Health in the University of Auckland, 2012]

[11 British Medical Association, 'Healthy Transport = Healthy Lives, 2012]