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Friday, 18 June 2004

Inquiry into Violence Associated with Motor Vehicle Use

We are pleased to submit the attached submission to the Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee of Parliament.

The primary purpose of this submission is to bring the consideration of pedestrians and cyclists within the scope of the committee's inquiry in its current terms of reference.

The regular and wide ranging reports of road rage towards cyclists and pedestrians is discussed often. However, as with road rage between car drivers, there is little known about the occurrence, impact and effects of this violence or indeed possible strategies to solve the problem.

The urbanbicyclist project publishes and distributed the "City Rider Guide" (attached) and provides advice to cyclists on a range of issues related to cycling in urban areas



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Response to Discussion Paper





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“Cyclists and pedestrians are more vulnerable to acts of assault on the road than other road users. Motor vehicles can be used as weapons and a slight swerve can result in a serious accident. For cyclists and motor bike riders, the seemingly more benign forms of “road rage”, for example driving too close to another vehicle, can in fact be very threatening and dangerous.”

– VCCA Report, April 1999

Introduction

The primary purpose of this submission is to bring the consideration of pedestrians and cyclists within the scope of the committee’s inquiry in its current terms of reference.

The regular and wide ranging reports of road rage towards cyclists and pedestrians is discussed often. However, as with road rage between car drivers, there is little known about the occurrence, impact and effects of this violence or indeed possible strategies to solve the problem.

The urbanbicyclist project publishes and distributed the “City Rider Guide” (attached) and provides advice to cyclists on issues surrounding cycling in urban areas such as:

- Riding in Traffic
- Riding in Wet Weather
- Dodging Car Doors
- Bicycles and Roundabouts
- Traffic Accidents
- Bike Maintenance
- Tips for Women
- Bicycle Security
- Bicycle Messengers
- Road Rules for cycling
- Cycling gear for the city
- Cars parked in Bike Lanes
- Info about 4WD’s
- Info about Air Pollution

Definition of Road Rage

Impulsive, Driving-related, Violence, Involving Strangers

The Committee's definition of 'road rage' is sound, however, in the discussion of its detail, further consideration needs to be given to road rage involving vulnerable classes of road users.

Definition of Road Rage Conclusion

Whilst the committee's definition of 'road rage' does not exclude the consideration of road rage involving cyclists and pedestrians, the Committee needs to ensure that pedestrians and cyclists are considered throughout the further work of the inquiry.

Measuring 'Road Rage'

There is no accurate data available on the incidence of road rage involving pedestrians or cyclists.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that cyclists who are the victim of road rage, even including damage or injury, are often turned away from police stations by police members who consider that either there is insufficient evidence or information to proceed with a case. Often this is perceived by the cyclist to mean that police do not seriously consider the needs of cyclists as road users.

Nature of 'Road Rage' involving Cyclists

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the nature of road rage involving cyclists consists of the following kinds of incidents:

- Passengers yelling at cyclists as vehicles drive past.
- Motor vehicles passing cyclists too closely.
- Objects being thrown at cyclists from moving vehicles.
- Cyclists riding 2 abreast being tooted
- Verbal sexual harassment directed at female cyclists.
- Cyclists being grabbed at by passing car occupants.

This situation is now to the point that police members from the Melbourne Bicycle Patrol Group, who through their work have developed links with the city cycling community, have been inundated with requests by members of the public involved in road rage incidents beyond the boundaries of Melbourne Police division. Their office has been forced by the magnitude of work generated, to develop a policy for the referral of these cases to suburban stations with advice to the victims on how to present their cases to local police.

Extent of Road Rage involving Pedestrians and Cyclists

There are two schools of thought to consider whilst determining the extent of road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists.

Pedestrians and cyclists are not fully involved players in the 'game' that is metropolitan traffic, they are vastly outnumbered by cars and in many cases are excluded, by design or circumstance from traffic, and on roads they generally inhabit the left hand side of the road, and area inhabited by slower vehicles and buses.

This theory would suggest that road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists would occur to a lesser a lesser extent than between drivers, however when you consider the large number of cars compared to a smaller number of cyclists, it's reasonable to assume that cyclists are involved in a larger number of road rage incidents per person than drivers do.

In order to further understand this relationship, research investigating the occurrence of road rage needs to include considerations of pedestrians and cyclists.

Measuring Road Rage Conclusion

Questions that need to be covered by the scope of the Committees research agenda.

- What is the extent of road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists?
- Is road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists occurring at a higher, lower or equal rate to that experienced between drivers?
- Who is committing road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists?
- How does road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists affect the community?

Causes of Road Rage

The range of causal factors outlined in the Committee's discussion paper probably all contribute to road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists in so far as they do in relation to road rage involving drivers. The purpose of this section is to add some further possible causes of road rage, with a particular emphasis on their consideration in relation to road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists.

A number of theories exist as to the causes of road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists.

Driving Culture and Unwritten Rules of the Road

Furthering the consideration of a driving culture involving a system of unwritten rules of the road as covered in the Discussion paper. It is reasonable to theorise that, there is a system of perceived submissive behaviours that drivers expect pedestrians and cyclists to adhere to, and when these are breached, drivers are entitled to respond in order to reinforce the dominance of the car in the traffic situation.

For example:

- Road rules entitle bicyclists to ride two abreast but often cyclists doing so are tooted and told to ride in single file.
- Cyclists passing on the left of cars waiting stationary at traffic lights and then waiting in front of traffic are tooted just before the lights turn green.
- Cyclists riding outside the 'door zone' (area where they may be hit by an opening car door) are forced back to the edge of the road.
- Pedestrians who are entitled to right of way but have their right of way breached by turning cars.
- Cyclists who are "advised" or forcible encouraged to "Get off the road" / "Get on the Footpath" by drivers who may believe that is where bicyclists legally belong.

Illegal Behaviour by Cyclists and Pedestrians

It is certain that if research were to be undertaken to better understand the causes of road rage incidents involving pedestrians and cyclists that the issue of "summary justice" would be raised by perpetrators of road rage against vulnerable road users.

There is a perception of non adherence to certain laws by each class of road user; generally different laws are favourably flouted by different classes of road users. Car drivers speed and use mobile phones whilst cyclists ride on the footpath and ignore traffic signals, taxi drivers double park and trucks tail gate small cars.

Generally road safety promotion and road rule enforcement campaigns are undertaken to focus on certain areas of favourable flouting.

A more detailed study of illegal behaviour by pedestrians and cyclists as a causal factor in road rage incidents should attempt to determine the characteristics of this summary justice in order to determine its nature.

For example, are cyclists who ignore red traffic signals more likely to be the victims of road rage by car drivers who witness this activity, or are all cyclists as a class of road user targeted for 'summary justice' by drivers who have previously witnessed cyclists ignoring traffic signals.

This analysis should then be linked to a consideration of which legal behaviours by pedestrians and cyclists are mistakenly assumed to be illegal, or those whilst legal are in breach of an unwritten code, for example, cyclists riding two abreast, or passing vehicles on the left whilst waiting at traffic lights.

Aggressive Drive Time Radio Commentary

Consider a psychological experiment where people are locked into small metal boxes, a small number are accompanied by friends or spouses, most are alone. Some can listen to popular or classical music, some talk with their co-occupants, and some listen to an aggressive monologue/dialogue. If we were to test the impulse/responses of the occupants, should we consider that the solo occupant exposed to the aggressive dialogue/monologue will behave the least rationally?

The committee should consider the effects of inflammatory commentary by drive time radio hosts, particularly anti bicyclist commentary, and the possible role this plays in aggravating road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists.

On occasions, drive time talk back callers and announcers have suggested that drivers should undertake acts of violence towards cyclists, activities ranging from sticking something between the spokes of bicycle wheels to putting pins on the road.

Intoxication

Cyclists regularly report harassment from intoxicated car occupants and drivers, particularly when beer cans are thrown at cyclists from moving vehicles.

On several occasions in 2003, Melbourne Police apprehended intoxicated drivers for road rage offences against cyclists. However charges against the drivers focussed on the intoxication rather than the harassment of cyclists.

Sexual Harassment

Female cyclists have reported a significant amount of sexual harassment from vehicles; generally however this is not any different to the type of sexual harassment targeted towards female pedestrians in non vehicular environments. Whilst not a key element of this submission as 'road rage' per se, if we consider sexual harassment to be a form of violence, then according to the parameters of road rage as previously defined, gender related factors should be considered in the commissioning of further research related to road rage involving pedestrians and cyclists as well as road rage between drivers of vehicles.

Causality Conclusion

The committee has raised a number of proposed "causes of road rage" and whilst they are obviously interconnected and of variable influence, a further consideration of how these theories involve pedestrians and cyclists is required.

Prevention Strategies

In the absence of the required research, it is not possible to submit a complete set of possible strategies. It is hoped that the consideration of pedestrians and cyclists in the further work of the committee would also yield a range of multi disciplinary strategies that would also address the involvement of pedestrians and cyclists in road rage.

Reducing Road congestion

There are too many possible strategies to achieve this aim to list in this submission in any detail. They are all however considered to be of significant merit if delivered as part of an integrated approach to transport in Melbourne. In short some of these concepts are:

- Increased Priority for Public Transport in Congested Areas
- Increased Public Transport Service Provision
- Greater Public Transport Operating Hours
- Ride to Work Programs
- Congestion Precinct Travel Demand Management Projects
- Travel Demand Management
- Travel Behaviour Change Programs
- Fringe Benefits Tax review to bring Public Transport Fares into parity with Petrol and Car prices or Vice Versa
- Provision of annual public transport tickets instead of company cars
- Workplace Car/Ride Sharing Programs
- Limiting the number of capital city car park developments instead of legislating their minimum requirements.
- Pay as you drive car insurance to reduce car use and encourage more equitable insurance regimes and reduce reckless attitudes to driving.
- Provision of Bus lanes in congested areas.
- Removal of clearways in shopping precincts.

Car Parking Levy to fund improvements in Public Transport

Capital City Car Parking Land Tax regimes are already in place in Sydney and Perth. In each case, a nominal tax is levied on car parking spaces within a defined area. In Sydney \$800 p.a. in the CBD and \$400 p.a. in Inner Sydney and Parramatta is collected.

This revenue is directly tied to the Public Transport Authority.

In Perth a similar scheme applies. The funds raised go directly to the CBD free shuttle bus.

No scheme exists in Melbourne.

Community Education

If research identifies that car drivers are unaware of road rules relating to cycling, further promotion of the existing Share The Road Campaign is required in places where this information is likely to educate or inform drivers who would otherwise feel obliged to force cyclists to ride single file.

Police Enforcement

A training program for police at suburban stations on dealing with road rage complaints should include procedures for dealing with pedestrians and cyclists involved in 'road rage' incidents.

Cycling Infrastructure Development

A common criticism of on road bicycle facilities is that they disappear at crucial moments, this is usually where road with is in high demand for the marking of vehicle lanes, bicycle infrastructure funding runs out or parts of the bike network are simply too difficult to complete given the current regulatory and financial priority given to their development. A program to identify squeeze points for bicycles and other vehicles due to the variable connectivity of bicycle facilities would deliver on reducing conflicts between drivers and cyclists as well as delivering on a range of related outcomes.

Aggressive Drive Time Radio Commentary

The Committee could undertake the theoretical study outlined above and the results of this study could be referred to the Australian Communications Authority for consideration and possible incorporation into broadcasting guidelines.

It's most likely that such comments are already in breach of regulations, where drive time radio hosts have encouraged drivers to harass or injure cyclists, these cases should be referred to the ACA.

Prevention Strategies Conclusion

This section has added to a wide range of possible strategies that could be implemented by various bodies. Some of these could assist in the resolution of conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and other road users if proper consideration is made explicit in the preparation of these strategies. Other strategies would also be extremely beneficial to reducing specific types of conflict in a more directed manner, for example, further development of bicycle facilities at points of conflict.