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The Amy Gillett Foundation 'A metre matters' campaign and other initiatives

by Tony Fox, CEO, Amy Gillett Foundation



What is 'A metre matters' and why is it so important? 'A metre matters' is the current national cycling safety campaign run by the Amy Gillett Foundation that aims to improve awareness of cyclists on our roads.

The Amy Gillett Foundation

The Amy Gillett Foundation was formed in 2006 after the tragic death of Australian cyclist Amy Gillett, who was hit by a car whilst training with the Australian Cycling Team in Germany. The objective of the Foundation is to decrease death and injury caused by the interaction of cyclists and motorists, and we have created a number of campaigns and programs to help achieve this.

One of the first tasks undertaken by the Foundation was to commission Monash University to compile data on bicycle and motor vehicle crashes, with the aim of better understanding how these accidents occur. Based on police data, this report [1] highlighted a number of pertinent issues:

- The majority of accidents occurred on weekdays (80%) and during peak hour times (56%).
- Most accidents were in daylight (82%) and on dry roads (92%).
- The majority of accidents occurred in situations when motorists should have been aware of the cyclist, with 21% of accidents involving vehicles travelling in the same direction, 28% involving manoeuvring vehicles and 29% involving vehicles coming from adjacent directions at intersections.

This analysis of police data suggested that drivers' lack of awareness of cyclists, and the inadequate space that drivers provide to cyclists on the road, is an important factor in cyclist safety. These findings underpinned the creation of the 'A metre matters' campaign, which asks motorists to provide an extra metre of space on the road for cyclists. See Figure 1. Whilst this campaign requests an extra metre, it is as much about general awareness as it is about specific distance.

With the support of Continental Tyres and a number of media outlets, the campaign has achieved very broad reach to date, including the following national initiatives:

- Television advertising through Channel Ten, OneHD and a number of Foxtel channels
- Cinema advertising through Val Morgan
- Roadside billboards in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane (See Figure 2)
- Approximately 6500 'A metre matters' cycling jerseys distributed across all states
- Wide distribution of merchandise products such as car bumper stickers.



Figure 1. Graphic from 'A metre matters' campaign

As a result of this visibility, the campaign has gained significant support, including a petition to the Queensland Government to legislate a metre as the minimum prescribed distance when passing a cyclist, potential council road signs and various online campaigns supporting the program.

The Amy Gillett Foundation and Monash University PhD scholarship

Research remains the best way of defining what the risk factors are for cyclists on our roads. Whilst there is relevant data and research regarding crash characteristics, very little is known about the causes of these accidents. This is the focus of a research PhD funded by the Amy Gillett Foundation and Monash University, and currently being undertaken by Marilyn Johnson.

Early results of this research highlight the relevance of the 'A metre matters' campaign and the need to improve motorist awareness of cyclists on the road. This research will provide extensive information regarding cyclist - motorist interaction, and this information will form the basis of the next Amy Gillett Foundation road safety campaign.



Figure 2. Billboard near Brisbane airport promoting 'A metre matters' campaign

This research is also highlighting that whilst motorist behaviour is a major factor in cyclist accidents, the behaviour of the cyclist also has an impact on whether accidents occur and on the severity of these accidents. Defensive riding skills, adherence to the road laws, using the right equipment and basic respect for other road users all have an impact on cyclist safety. Poor cycling behaviour can have an immediate safety risk, but also a long-term risk if this behaviour creates a bad opinion of cyclists in the minds of motorists, and consequent aggression.

The AustCycle program

The AustCycle program, jointly owned by Cycling Australia and the Amy Gillett Foundation, is a new program that will

standardize cycling training within Australia and ensure that the highest quality of skill and knowledge development is available to all Australians. Based on the AustSwim model, AustCycle has been trialled successfully in NSW and is now being rolled out around Australia.

Soon all Australians, both young and old, will be able to access a skilled, highly trained, accredited AustCycle trainer, who will be able to teach them everything from bike setup and bike handling skills to road laws and how to ride safely on our roads.

Conclusion

'A metre matters', PhD research and AustCycle cycling training are just some of the initiatives being undertaken by the Amy Gillett Foundation in our mission to make roads safer for cyclists. Other programs include:

- Road Right – Teaching learner drivers about road rules as they relate to cyclists. For more information, see <http://www.amygillett.org.au/education-road-right>.
- Ride Right – Information about how to buy the correct fitting bike and helmet, plus the relevant accessories. See <http://www.amygillett.org.au/ride-right>.
- 'Remembering Amy' Schools Program – Presentations to school children about cycle safety, general life skills and coping with loss.
- Amy's Rides – Mass participation rides in Victoria, South Australia and ACT, which reinforce correct riding behaviour.

These programs, along with additional programs driven by research findings, will form the front line in the quest to improve the behaviour, awareness and respect of both cyclists and motorists on Australian roads. This will have the long-term effect of making our roads safer for all road users.

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The politics of cycling and cycling advocacy

by Ashley Carruthers, Pedal Power

Pedal Power's mantra is 'More Canberrans cycling, more often, for a better community'. We are a non-profit organisation with some 3000 members. Our key focus is on advocating for a better cycling infrastructure for Canberra, although the organisation has a diverse range of activities. These include organising rides like Fitz' Challenge and the Big Canberra Bike Ride, offering member services including insurance, maintaining the website, publishing Canberra Cyclist, writing press releases and newspaper articles, advising ACT Government on matters related to cycling, and making submissions on cycling provisions for new roads, road upgrades and new building complexes.

The mission of getting more people cycling in the ACT is obviously linked to that of creating safe environments in which to ride, and Pedal Power is committed to the maintenance and development of safe on- and off-road paths catering to the needs of the territory's diverse cycling community. One of our recent safety-related advocacy pushes has been for a blanket 40km/h speed limit in Canberra's town and group centres. We have also been involved in advocacy for pedestrian and bike friendly 'shared surfaces' in the city's commercial zones, and have recently presented government with a well developed plan for a Civic Cycle Loop, a project aimed at making Civic more accessible to people walking and riding bikes.

Advocacy for safety

By means of its website, e-bulletins and magazine, Pedal Power encourages people who ride in Canberra to note the location of hazards on cycle paths and report these to Roads ACT. In addition to this, Pedal Power is involved in educating its members and other riders in Canberra about riding safely, wearing helmets and making themselves more visible to other road users by having proper lighting and wearing high-visibility clothing.

In everyday terms, Pedal Power comes face to face with cycling safety issues most regularly in the form of poor and even dangerous on- and off-road path design and implementation. A great deal of our time is taken up with commenting on plans for new and upgraded roads and intersections that fail to meet cycling guidelines. Road and path designers and builders all too often unwittingly create danger for people on bikes by doing things like introducing 'slip lanes' that abruptly terminate their priority, providing dangerous crossing points or using unsuitable surfaces.

The unceasing task of commenting on road and path plans is an exceptionally fine and detailed one, but when one steps back from it, the larger issue is that of the co-existence of cars, bicycles and pedestrians. Thus, our work on improving path safety is ultimately about making priority on the road a more equal affair, and making the road a more diverse and mutually respectful place. If one believes in this shared space philosophy, from these things greater safety for all should follow.

When it comes to cycling, we know there is safety in numbers. The more people out on bikes, the more mindful other road users will be of them. Thus, Pedal Power's very mission of increasing numbers of riders is also a mission of increasing safety. In terms of the former, we have undoubtedly been successful. An estimated 85,000 Canberrans cycle regularly. Our annual cordon count in 2010 found cycling into Canberra centre had increased 48% over the past four years, and 64% over the past six years. The on-road paths on Northbourne Avenue, the city's busiest road, are the most heavily used by people on bicycles.

Redesign of Northbourne Avenue

The ACT Government is currently planning to redesign Northbourne Avenue to make it more amenable to sustainable transport by introducing dedicated bus lanes. Ironically, one scenario is that the on-road cycle lanes might go to make space for the buses. In the course of the public debate about this, the issue of the safety of people riding in on-road lanes on Northbourne Avenue has come up more than once. Pedal Power has taken the position in its press releases that perceptions about the dangerousness of the lanes are in fact not backed up by accident statistics.

We are in favour of the provision of separate off-road paths along Northbourne Avenue – perhaps down the wide leafy median strip, as suggested by the Greens – but we argue that

the on-road lanes should be left in place because they provide a proven safe route for the significant number of faster bike commuters who would be unlikely to use slower off-road paths. There is something of a safety paradox in this issue. On the one hand, on-road riders are perhaps at greater risk of being struck by cars because of minimal separation, while on the other hand, their high visibility on this busy path may have a consciousness-raising effect on drivers, and thus a positive effect on safety.

Civic Cycle Loop

One of Pedal Power's key safety-related initiatives for 2010 is the Civic Cycle Loop, an innovative 3-kilometre circular route that will connect all of Civic and link into existing and new cycle paths. One of the problems with Canberra's cycle path network is that paths tend to peter out when they arrive at the periphery of town centres. The point of the Civic Loop is to join the dots, thus creating the potential to cycle safely anywhere in Civic within 5 to 10 minutes on the most direct and desirable routes.

Once built, commuters and shoppers will be able to use the Loop to ride into, through and around Civic. Tourists and locals will ideally be able to pick up hire bikes from around the Loop to make quick and convenient journeys. The Civic Cycle Loop will take cycling facilities to a level of European-influenced design not yet seen in Canberra, using as it does the 'second generation' of Copenhagen-style physically separated cycle lanes.

The plan also calls for the redesign of some streets, such as Bunda Street in Civic's heart, as shared surfaces, along the lines of what is being done in Bendigo's CBD. This strategy involves sending cues to drivers that they are in a different and unusual road space where it is appropriate to slow down, and where they should not expect absolute priority. Pedal Power's glossy and informative submission on the Civic Cycle Loop is available on our website [1], and we hope that it might serve as an example to other organisations wishing to lobby for similar facilities in their cities.

Extended 40km/h speed zones

Another of our recent safety initiatives is the push for extended 40km/h speed zones in Canberra's town and group centres. In 2008, almost a quarter of the casualties on ACT roads involved people on foot and on bicycles (3 dead, 101 injured). Nationally, over one-third of fatal crashes in 2008 occurred in zones with a speed limit of 60km/h or lower. In the year to September 2007, 78 Australians were killed on foot or on bicycles in zones of 50km/h or lower, suggesting that the default 50km/h limit is still too high.

Research indicates a spike in death and serious injury at impact speeds of above 30km/h, with the death rate rising to 45% at 50km/h. While ideally one would like to argue for a 30km/h limit on streets seeing a lot of walking and cycling, it seems unlikely that Australian drivers or governments would find this palatable. For now, 40km/h zones are a workable compromise.

An overwhelming number of cities and towns, both in Australia and overseas, have already adopted 40km/h or lower blanket speed limits. Reduced speed limits are proven to encourage cycling and walking, which provide tangible benefits for health, sustainability and the quality of urban life. Research in Europe and the UK has shown that making cities walkable and rideable even benefits business, since people who commute to retail precincts by these means tend to stay longer and shop more. Lower speed limits are also of course consistent with the shared streets concept, which brings greater safety, diversity and urban vibrancy in its wake. Pedal Power's exhaustive study of this issue is available on our website.

In February 2010 the ACT Government announced that it would trial 40km/h speed zones for Canberra's town centres and shopping centres. Implementation will be over the coming months.

'Vision zero' approach

Pedal Power has also been supportive of ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope's call for a 'Vision zero' approach for Canberra. 'Vision zero' is a philosophy of road safety first introduced in Sweden in 1997, which establishes the goal of zero deaths or serious injuries in the road transport system. Chief Minister Stanhope called for 'an uncompromising commitment to road safety' in Canberra in a media release of 13 May 2009.

Pedal Power agrees that a targeted reduction of speed limits (and associated enforcement activity) is a good first step in tackling one of the key causes of road trauma. The twin initiatives of the Civic Cycle Loop and 40km/h speed zones will be our key safety related foci over the coming year.

Pedal Power is a diverse organisation incorporating many points of view. However, it is fair to say that all of us on the advocacy committee share the view that we are not in favour of the rigid separation of people on bikes from other road users. We know that people who ride are a diverse bunch, ranging from hardcore roadies and super-commuters to mums and dads pulling child trailers. Some of us are all three at various times! These different modes of cycling require a mix of on- and off-road facilities.

In addition, we can see benefits arising from increasing numbers of people on bikes sharing space on the road with other users. Our vision for safe cycling involves a changed road environment in which significant parts of our cities and towns are low speed zones with high numbers of walkers and people

on bicycles. Riding in spaces that are more pluralistic in terms of who is on the road and how they are using it, and in which all road users are mutually aware and respectful of each other, seems to us the best guarantee of riding safely.

While Pedal Power encourages members and all people who ride in the ACT to conform to helmet laws, many of us are private helmet agnostics. If one looks at the extremely low cycle accident statistics for the Netherlands, where cycle commuters almost never wear helmets, it quickly becomes clear that it is the unsafe nature of the Australian road environment that is in fact putting people on bikes at risk.

Those who ride naturally have a responsibility to do all they can to ensure their own safety and that of others, but in an inherently dangerous road environment, they can only do so much. The solution to this is not to retreat from the road, but to advocate for roads designed to create diversity, respect and mutually assured safety.

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