

Footpaths are for Feet

Position Statement

Bicycle Network (a Victorian network of bike riders) is calling on State Governments in Victoria, NSW, SA and WA to raise the legal riding age on footpaths to 16 years of age.

In Victoria, the law states that children under the age of 12 can ride their bikes on the footpath with an adult supervising, but they must give way to pedestrians. People aged 12 years or more must ride on the road unless they have and carry a relevant medical certificate.

Victoria Walks opposes the change to legislation for a number of reasons, including the impact it will have on the safe mobility of pedestrians.



Walking is the most popular, affordable and readily attainable form of physical activity, with more than one million Victorians actively walking for exercise. About one-quarter of the population walks as part of their exercise regime – more than people going to the gym (about 17%) and cycling (about 8%).¹

Footpaths are the foundation of our public spaces, used by all members of the community – including seniors, families, those on mobility scooters and the disabled. Footpaths are not only thoroughfares – they are for stopping, talking, playing, living and learning. Cycling on footpaths disrupts this and brings pressures to ‘keep left’ and ‘keep moving’.

It is important people **are safe** and **feel safe** when walking on footpaths.

The Facts

The evidence indicates that riding on footpaths is no safer for cyclists than cycling on the road.

A comprehensive literature review of European and North American research found “Most studies that considered sidewalk-riding suggested that it is particularly hazardous for cyclists, with estimates of 1.8 to 16 times the risk of cycling on-road.”²

Teenagers and riding on footpaths

Bicycle Network states that teenagers are risk takers and their visual and perceptual skills aren’t fully

developed, so allowing students to ride on footpaths means they can learn these skills in an environment with far less traffic.

It is common knowledge that teenagers can engage in risk taking behaviour, so there is no guarantee they will ride in ways that protect their own safety or the safety of others. Moving cyclists to footpaths will not reduce the risk to the cyclist, but it will present new risks to pedestrians.

Research suggests that at 12 years of age cyclists have an adult-like capacity to choose gaps in traffic and children aged 12-14 years have the same response time as adults when cycling.³

Victoria Walks believes it is essential that 12-16 year olds learn the skills required to ride safely, but this does not mean footpaths are the only option.

“While it is important to choose safe places to ride that are away from traffic (e.g. bicycle trails and paths, bicycle lanes), feasible alternatives are not always available. Thus, it is important that children learn how to ride in and near traffic.”³

Vulnerable members of our community

With cyclists on the footpath, the more vulnerable walkers in particular – seniors, children, people with vision impairment or other disability – would be at increased risk of a collision.

¹ ABS (2013). Participation in Sport and Physical Recreation, Australia, 2011-12 (Victoria, Table 5).

² Reynolds, C; Harris, M; Teschke, K; Crompton, P; and Winters, M (2009). ‘The Impact of Transportation Infrastructure on Bicycling Injuries and Crashes: A Review of the Literature.’ Environmental Health, Vol. 8, 2009.

³ Ellis, J. (2014). Bicycle safety education for children from a developmental and learning perspective (Report No. DOT HS 811 880). Washington, DC: National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

“Cyclists are really bad...and I ride a bike myself, but they scare me... Bicycle Victoria says ‘obey the road rules’ but they don’t.”

Senior Victorian.⁵

In a survey of 607 Victorians with vision impairment, as pedestrians 8% had been involved in a collision and 20% in a near collision over the previous five years. A **quarter** of these collisions (or near collisions) were with bicycles.⁴

Dr Jan Garrard’s 2013 report *Senior Victorians and walking: obstacles and opportunities*⁵ demonstrates that walking is critical for senior Victorians to live healthy, independent lives.

For those aged 75 and over, walking makes up 77% of their total physical activity. And as seniors get older, their walking is more about everyday needs, with walking for shopping or personal business increasing from 53% of trips for 60-69 year olds to 81% of trips for those aged over 80.

The study included a survey of 1128 senior Victorians – 39% rated bicycle riders on shared walking or cycling paths as a moderate to major constraint to their walking. Cyclists on footpaths will deter seniors from walking and limit their ability to live their everyday lives.

Cycling and Walker Crashes

Between July 2010 and June 2013 a total of 3,075 pedestrians were admitted to hospital in Victoria. Of these, 95 were the result of collision with a cyclist.⁶ These figures do not include injuries requiring other medical attention (eg. at a GP).

The relatively low proportion of reported serious collisions with cyclists (3.1% of pedestrian injuries) may be due to low levels of exposure to cyclists (only 1.7% of transport trips are made by bike⁷), rather than any inherent safety in the interaction between pedestrians and cyclists. As cycling increases and competition for space between cyclists and pedestrians also increases, the risk of injury to pedestrians can be expected to increase.

Evidence suggests that cyclists do not necessarily slow down when they share a path with pedestrians. A study from Sydney and Newcastle found the average speed of cyclists on footpaths was 21 km/h, exactly the same speed as cyclists on roads with a speed limit of 50 km/h or less.⁸

An investigation of cycling speeds in the shared zone on Southbank (in Melbourne) found that less than 10% were complying with the 10km/h recommended speed.⁹

Footpaths are critical for all members of our community, including seniors and people with limited mobility, to move around their neighbourhood – having teenagers ride on footpaths will deter them from walking and utilising these important public spaces. Nothing should undermine the important role of footpaths in our community.

Victoria Walks strongly supports:

- Retaining the current Victorian law in relation to cycling on footpaths.
- The community and government working together to find solutions for both walking and cycling, while ensuring pedestrian safety is not compromised.

“The interaction between pedestrians and cyclists is increasingly causing safety concerns... Some of these concerns are real and others are perceived, but nevertheless important in terms of people’s willingness to walk”

Austrroads¹⁰

4 Oxley, J; Liu, S; Langford, J; Bleachmore, M; Guaglio, A (2012). Road Safety for Pedestrians’ Who Are Blind or Have Low Vision. Monash University Accident Research Centre and Vision Australia.

5 www.victoriawalks.org.au/seniors

6 Oxley, J; and Hern, S (2014). Unpublished analysis of Victorian Admitted Episodes Dataset, July 2010 to June 2013.

7 Department of Transport (2009). Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity 2007 (VISTA07).

8 Grzebieta R; McIntosh A; and Chong S (2011). Pedestrian-Cyclist Collisions: Issues and Risk. Australasian College of Road Safety Conference, Melbourne 1-2 September 2011.

9 Herald Sun (2013). Two-wheeled missiles are hitting our bicycle paths, 12 October 2013.

10 Austrroads (2006). Pedestrian-Cyclist Conflict Minimisation on Shared Paths and Footpaths.

