

# Shared paths – finding solutions

Councils and other agencies have provided shared paths in good faith, in order to encourage walking and cycling, but some paths have exceeded expectations for cycling. Victoria Walks [Seniors Research](#) found that sharing paths with cyclists was a significant concern for older walkers.

## Victoria Walks' research

Victoria Walks undertook research culminating in [Shared paths – the issues](#), a comprehensive report that included a literature review and stakeholder consultation with subject experts, VicRoads and 18 local councils. This was then summarised in a position statement, [Shared paths – finding solutions](#).

Recent evidence suggests that shared paths can be hazardous for cyclists. A study of cycling crashes in ACT found 36% were on shared paths. However the safety issues for walkers on shared paths do not appear to have been assessed by quality research.

Cyclists generally travel faster on shared paths than the 20 km/h envisaged in the Austroads guidelines and the requirement for cyclists to give way to pedestrians on shared paths is not well understood. Initial findings from the VicRoads *Cycling Road Rules Survey* indicate that this is one of three rules that many people “are unaware of or unclear about,” compared to other rules. Related to this, shared paths are often described as ‘bike paths,’ even by local authorities.

High levels of commuter cycling is making some of our key recreation paths uncomfortable places to walk. At the extreme, the Main Yarra Trail/Capital City Trail records 811 riders per hour in the peak. Walkers who are elderly or vision impaired are particularly vulnerable and uncomfortable sharing with cyclists.

Both walkers and cyclists prefer segregated or separated paths, when user numbers are high. While cyclists generally prefer shared paths to riding on the road, in a survey of over 600 Victorian cyclists, 66% said they ‘really like’ riding on a segregated path, compared to 7% for a shared path.

## Victoria Walks Position

- Shared paths with high volumes of cyclists (more than 50 per hour in the commuter peak) should be identified for separation/segregation; or consider options where cyclists can safely ride on roads.
- Where existing shared paths cannot be separated/segregated, public education and signage should aim to:
  - Establish a culture of sharing paths by users
  - Emphasise shared paths should be low speed; and that cyclists are legally required to give way to walkers (public awareness of this is low).
- Road managers should avoid converting footpaths to shared paths, as they may be ‘designing out’ the most vulnerable road users – older walkers and those with a disability.
- In new suburbs, cyclists should be provided with dedicated cycling paths or safe on-road cycling conditions and walkers with footpaths, rather than shared paths.

**Shared paths – finding solutions**  
Position statement and recommendations

**Victoria Walks**

**The issues, the facts**  
**Cyclists and Walkers**

Walking is the most popular form of leisure related physical activity in the Victorian population and at the same time, cycling ridership is growing very quickly in Victoria (9.5% increase between 2013 and 2014)<sup>1</sup>. This, combined with the fact that shared paths are a popular choice for off-road cyclists, has resulted in a significant problem starting to emerge.

<sup>1</sup>“Almost three-quarters of recreational paths on the Metropolitan Trail Network, originally intended for leisure and low levels of transport use, now have high levels of transport use.”<sup>2</sup>

Councils and other agencies have provided shared paths in good faith, in order to encourage walking and cycling, but some paths have exceeded expectations for cycling. At the extreme, the Main Yarra Trail/Capital City Trail records 811 riders per hour in the peak.<sup>3</sup>

Recent evidence suggests that shared paths can be particularly hazardous for cyclists. For example, a study of cycling crashes in ACT found 36% were on shared paths.<sup>4</sup> However the safety issues for walkers on shared paths do not appear to have been assessed by quality research – a significant gap given that shared paths are common infrastructure.

**“There is substantial evidence of the incompatibility of cyclists and motor vehicles but little to justify shifting the risk to shared paths where similar incompatibility exists between pedestrians and cyclists...”<sup>5</sup>**

1. Australian Council on Road Design (2013) Pedestrian and Cyclist Paths.  
2. Bicycle Network Group, Super Township 8th Commuter Survey, Victoria 2014.  
3. State of Victoria (2014). Cycling into the future 2013-14. Victorian Cycling Strategy.  
4. De Waard, L., Brookhuis, K., Garbarino, J., Spenneman, L., Brackmann, D., and Brookhuis, K. (2014). Walk to cycle in different riding environments in the Australian Capital Territory. Traffic Injury Prevention 2014;15(5):418-6.

## Media coverage and communications

The research was released in June 2015 through Victoria Walks communication channels including a website news story, newsletter item, Facebook and Twitter. The research has a permanent [page](#) on the Victoria Walks website.

Given the complications and sensitivities of the issue, Victoria Walks did not seek mass media coverage. However, the research was reported, largely favourably, on a number of cycling forums including the [Bicycle Network website](#) and [Australian Cyclists Party](#) Facebook.

In August 2015 a wide range of contacts and stakeholders were notified by email. In September, Victoria Walks wrote to all Victorian councils advising them of the research.

The research was featured in [AusPAnet E-news](#) in October 2015 and highlighted in an email to members of the Metropolitan Transport Forum in September.

Duane Burt wrote an article for the Planning Institute magazine *Planning News* in November 2015 (not published electronically).

## Influencing practise

There was an extended session on shared paths at the Smart Urban Futures conference in March 2015, with Duane presenting the research and Bart Sbeghen from Bicycle Network providing a cycling perspective. Shared paths have been the focus of a number of other Victoria Walks presentations, including [Walk21 Sydney](#), the [Institute of Transport Engineers, May 2015](#) and MAV walkability champions forum October 2015. Victoria Walks led a workshop on shared paths at the Bike Futures Conference in October 2015.

Victoria Walks research is now being utilised by other groups, lobbyists and media concerned about cyclist behaviour on shared paths. See for example [Leader Community News](#), the [Nelson Mail](#) (New Zealand) and the [Walk Auckland website](#).

The shared paths research has been incorporated into many aspects of Victoria Walks work, such as our submission on the Victorian Cycling Strategy, December 2015 and the keynote presentation to the [2WalkandCycle Conference](#) in New Zealand, July 2016.

There is strong evidence that this is influencing practice by key agencies:

- Most promisingly, VicRoads commenced a project on Management of User Safety on Shared Paths: Addressing Cyclist Speed in late 2015. Whilst still under consideration, the draft recommendations of that study align closely with the recommendations of Victoria Walks' research.
- The Metropolitan Planning Authority (MPA) advised that they would consider it in the development of precinct structure plans.
- VicRoads guidance on growth areas planning was reviewed in 2015. After advocacy from Victoria Walks, backed by the research, VicRoads and MPA moved away from shared paths in the road environment and [Guidelines for Planning Road Networks in Growth Areas](#) now promote separated walking and cycling paths on arterial roads.
- In May 2016, Infrastructure Victoria included an option of Bicycle and Walking Path Separation in their options document *All Things Considered*.



Victoria Walks Inc.  
Level 7, 225 Bourke Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000  
P: 03 9662 3975  
E: [info@victoriawalks.org.au](mailto:info@victoriawalks.org.au)  
[www.victoriawalks.org.au](http://www.victoriawalks.org.au)  
Registration No. A0052693U

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