

BOROONDARA

Bicycle Users Group

Boroondara Bicycle Users Group
Submission on:

City of Boroondara's
Resolution to investigate current local laws that apply to the use of pathways within
Council's reserves and parks network by cyclists, pedestrians and other users.

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Boroondara Bicycle Users Group exists to promote cycling and to advocate for improvements to cycling infrastructure in Boroondara and surrounding areas. BBUG will make this submission available on its website.

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Referenced documents:

- City of Boroondara Bicycle Strategy, 2008
- City of Boroondara TravelSmart Map
- VicRoads Crash Statistics, <http://crashstat1.roads.vic.gov.au/crashstats/crash.htm>

Executive Summary

Boroondara BUG strongly believes that no further restrictions should be introduced on the use of paths through Council's reserves and parks network by cyclists. We believe that to do so would be in conflict with Council's own Bicycle Strategy, and with Council's often stated support for sustainable transport. Rather than offering greater protection to Boroondara's citizens it would expose them to significantly greater danger of serious injury and death.

Introduction

The Boroondara BUG is surprised that Council sees a need to even consider making changes to the local law in regard to cycling in parks. We believe that this action is being undertaken at the behest of a vocal minority and we doubt that there is widespread support for such changes.

The City of Boroondara generally rates well in its expenditure on cycling infrastructure and other programs to encourage cycling. It has a detailed and well thought out bicycle strategy.

The overall goal as stated in the Bicycle Strategy is ‘to increase the number of cyclists using Boroondara’s bicycle network and facilities’.

As stated in the strategy there are many benefits attached to an increase in cycling. These include health benefits to individuals, and a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

The strategy specifically mentions the goal of increasing cycling in currently under-represented groups including women, school children and senior citizens

Since the Bicycle Strategy was adopted by Council in September 2008 Boroondara’s Transport Management Team have been working steadily to implement the needed improvements listed. As a result the number of people cycling in and through the municipality has been steadily increasing.

To further restrict cycling through parks would be in complete conflict with the stated goals of the strategy and undermine much of what that has been achieved.

Dangers of On-Road Cycling Compared with Dangers to Pedestrians from Cyclists

Thousands of cyclists, predominantly experienced adult males, ride on Boroondara’s roads each day as part of their daily commute to work, school, university or wherever. However this is a relatively dangerous option, and death and serious injury to cyclists on our roads are distressingly common. Boroondara is ranked 1st highest of the 16 municipalities in the Melbourne south east metropolitan area for cyclist fatalities and serious injuries. Boroondara is ranked 6th highest of all of the 27 Melbourne metropolitan municipalities for cyclist casualties per 100,000 population

With population density in the municipality growing apace, congestion on our roads is also increasing. Although measures are being taken to improve on-road cycling facilities, on-road commuting is most unlikely to become significantly safer without radical changes to our metropolitan transport systems that lie beyond the control of Council.

It is easy to believe that pedestrians on both the shared paths and the informal bike routes through parks do feel threatened by cyclists on occasion. Boroondara BUG accepts that

some cyclists do ride too fast for the conditions and pedestrians may actually be hit on occasion. However it is a very rare occurrence to read or hear reports of death or serious injury to pedestrians as a result of collisions with cyclists. Reports of serious injuries and even deaths resulting from dog attacks are much more common. Boroondara BUG also hears not infrequently of cyclists injured by collisions with dogs.

Council cannot remove all risk associated with using its parks. Unless there is clear evidence of significant numbers of deaths or serious injuries to pedestrians as a result of collisions with cyclists, there is no case whatsoever for changing the local law to further restrict cyclists' use of paths in parks. Forcing more cyclists onto the roads will certainly result in more deaths and injuries in total. Reducing the number of people cycling will result in greater congestion on our roads and increased air pollution, as well as poorer health for those individuals who drive rather than ride to work, school or wherever.

Parks and Reserves Provide Vital Off-Road Links

A study of the Boroondara TravelSmart Map reveals that a number of officially designated shared paths pass through Boroondara's parks. In addition to these at least as many informal bike routes (shown as blue dotted lines and red dashed lines) also pass through parks. Often these informal bike routes provide vital links to or between quiet back streets and enable cyclists to avoid dangerous main roads. Many of them also provide short cuts and/or allow cyclists to avoid steep grades, both important factors in encouraging cycling as an alternative to driving.

Some of the more significant informal routes through parks include:

- Ferndale Trail, and Back Creek, Glen Iris. Ferndale Trail is listed for upgrading to an official shared path in the Bicycle Strategy, Table 4, item 15, and now appears on the VicRoads Revised Principal Bicycle Network.
- Hays Paddock, Stradbroke Park and a series of linear parks to the southeast, Balwyn. As well as providing an extremely useful link between the east-west Koonung Creek/Yarra Trail corridor and the north-south Anniversary Trail, this is a useful ride to school route for students at Kew High School. The Transport Management Team have undertaken a number of works designed to improve this route for cyclists, and to make it safer for all users, in line with the Bicycle Strategy, Table 4, item 20.
- Gordon Barnard Reserve, Hislop Park and Macleay Park, Balwyn. This is currently being developed as a useful east-west bike route for locals providing safe access to several facilities including Balwyn High School and the Balwyn Leisure Centre
- St James Park, Grace Park and Central Gardens, Hawthorn. These form part of a bike route through Hawthorn, which could in future become part of a much needed east-west route from Hawthorn to Box Hill through the centre of

Boroondara. Work has recently been done to improve the path that leads from Linda Cr to Grace Park.

As well as these major informal bike routes there are many smaller parks which provide useful routes for local cyclists, enabling them to avoid busy roads or tedious detours. Details can be found in the Bicycle Strategy, Table 4.

Along with most other cycling advocacy groups, Boroondara BUG believes that in order to increase rates of cycling, especially amongst the three groups identified in the Boroondara Bicycle Strategy, women, school students and senior citizens, it is necessary to provide routes where cyclists are separated from motor traffic and feel safe.

There are not a lot of options for providing such facilities in densely settled areas such as Boroondara, where land is mostly built on and roads are already heavily congested. Apart from creeks and rail reservations, parks and reserves are some of the few options available.

Recreational Riding in Parks

In addition to the use of links through parks by utility cyclists, paths through parks are well used by recreational cyclists. Many individual cyclists, groups of friends and cycling clubs carefully plan routes to pass through as many parks as possible in order to enjoy their various charms, to use facilities such as seats, picnic tables and toilets, and to escape from the hurly burly of the roads and streets. This is a use of open space that is every bit as legitimate as other uses including walking and dog walking.

These cyclists are rate payers whose interests are just as important as those of walkers or dog walkers. Many of them also fall into the category of senior citizens, one of the Bicycle Strategy's target groups. Cycling is particularly beneficial to this age group helping to maintain physical fitness as well as providing valuable opportunities for social contact.

Consistency with Regulations Made Under the Road Safety Act

The motion carried by Council makes reference to better aligning local law with regulations made under the Road Safety Act. Under these regulations several classes of people **are** allowed to ride on footpaths. These include children under 12, adults accompanying such children, Australia Post workers, and people with a relevant medical certificate.

The Boroondara BUG sees no particular reason why rules relating to riding in parks need to be in line with those relating to riding on footpaths as these are two quite different situations. However we do in fact believe that all cyclists should be permitted to ride on footpaths, subject to certain sensible restrictions relating to shopping centres during business hours and such. Cycling on footpaths is permitted in a number of other

Australian states and territories, viz Queensland, Tasmania, the ACT and the Northern Territory. It is the regulations made under the Victorian Road Safety Act that need to change not the local law.

We do not imagine that Council would consider making Boroondara's local law even more restrictive than the VicRoads regulations. In particular it would be totally unacceptable if children were not permitted to ride on paths in our parks. This is by far the safest place for them to learn to ride, a process which for many children takes lots of practice. To learn to ride safely children need to ride on paths with adults who can keep close watch on them and call out instructions to slow down, keep left and such as needed.

Conclusion

It is perhaps understandable that non-cyclist park users may hanker after a largely imagined golden age when they could roam along paths through parks without having to be aware of what other path users are doing, or needing to take any care to keep themselves out of harm's way. However if such conditions ever existed it is completely unrealistic to imagine that they can be replicated in this era of rapid population growth. Open space is a scarce and precious resource which needs to be shared, between walkers, cyclists and various other types of users.

If Boroondara Council is concerned to maximize the health and safety of its citizens it will not take any action that will lead to further restrictions on cycling through the city's parks. Rather it will encourage continuing implementation of the Bicycle Strategy to make these paths safer for all users.

Restricting cycling through parks will result in more cyclists risking death or serious injury on our roads, and/or fewer people cycling leading to greater road congestion and poorer health.

It will also certainly lead to an expensive and time consuming push to develop and sign more official shared pathways as local cyclists take action to protect their right to ride where they feel safe. Realistically it is very unlikely to lead to a significant decrease in cycling through parks.

BBUG Recommended Actions

The Boroondara BUG strongly believes that no changes should be made to the local law to further restrict cycling through Boroondara's parks. Further public education campaigns to encourage safe sharing of paths may be in order. Additional signage and/or pavement marking to alert path users to keep left and to encourage cyclists to give warnings may also be warranted. Work to improve the safety of paths in parks for all users should continue as speedily as possible.