

Bicycle Transportation Alliance



Tuesday, 24 February 2015

Dear Senator Sterle,

My name is Heinrich Benz. I am the CEO of the Bicycle Transport Alliance, Western Australia, (BTAWA), and have spent the last eight years working towards a safer road environment for people who ride bicycles as their method of transport in their everyday life. For example, using bicycles to go to work, school, bus and train stations, shops and visit friends and family

I am pleased to engage in the process of making Australian roads safer for all kinds of users. Irrespective of whether people travel by car, by public transport, walk or ride a bicycle they all have the right to make that journey safely.

Australia is falling behind the OECD countries when it comes to the reduction of road crash victims, and in my opinion this is due to a car centric approach to road safety, strengthened by the unwillingness of politicians to promote policies that might disadvantage motorists and therefore cost votes.

Cyclists' mode share of trips to work is less than 2%, but nearly 15% of road users hospitalised are people riding bicycles. Between 2002 and 2007 serious cyclist injuries have increased nearly 50%, and last year 45 cyclists were killed on Australian roads. In West Australia we lost nine people riding bicycles, the worst toll I can remember. According to BITRE (Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics) "pedal cyclists [deaths] show non-decreasing trends".

If Australia wants to reap the many benefits of active transport in regards to congestion and population health the road environment for people riding to work, school, shops or train stations has to improve dramatically.

The inquiry can recommend measures relating to speed, infrastructure, funding and legislation, and I hope that it will do this in a manner that makes roads safer for all road users.

Heinrich Benz

CEO Bicycle Transport Alliance,

2, Delhi Street,

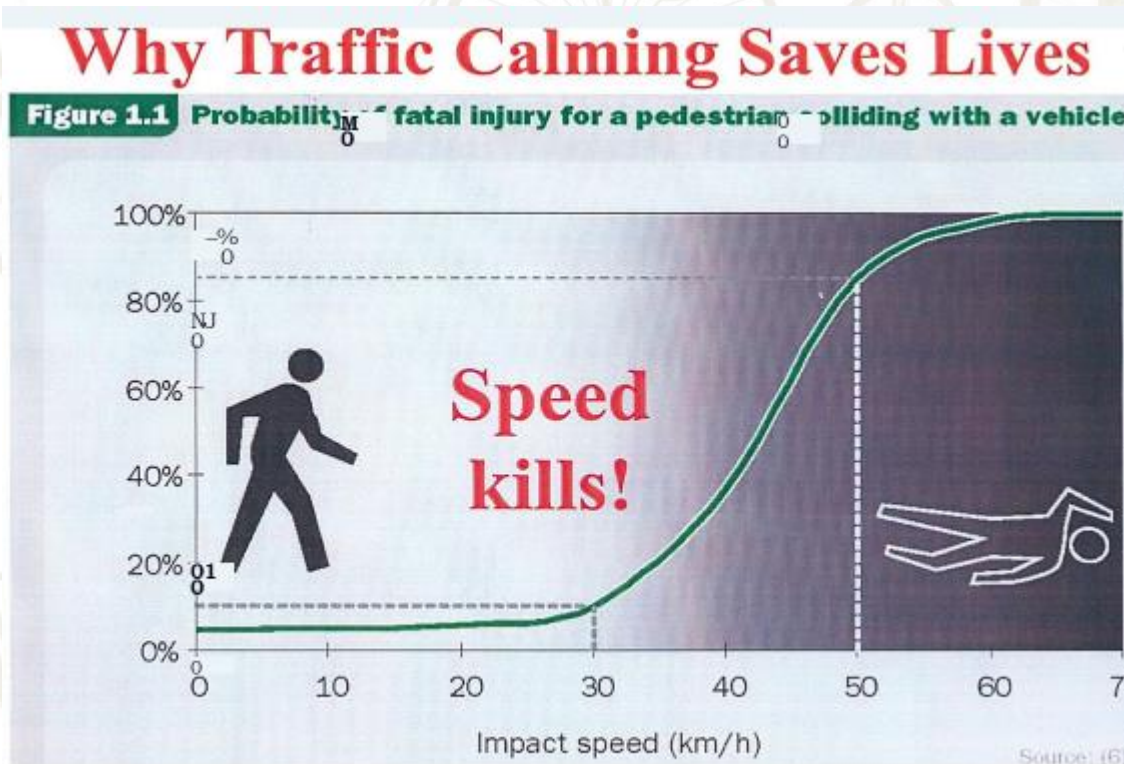
West Perth WA 6005



Factors affecting road safety for people riding bicycles

Speed

For people riding bicycles, the biggest single factor of concern when riding on streets in urban and suburban environments is the speed at which cars travel. All available research supports the concept that where vulnerable road users and cars are forced to use the same road space, the safe speed is 30kmh.



Source: World Health Organization (2008) and OECD Transport Research Centre (2006)

30kmh is the speed that should be legislated as the blanket speed in all urban and suburban areas.

Exceptions are distributor roads. They can be signposted at a higher speed. This will have the side benefit of removing unnecessary traffic from residential streets, and makes “rat running” less attractive.

All roads within 1 km of a school should be at 30kmh at least for the time period when kids are going to or leaving school, but preferably all the time.

13 million people in the UK are living in streets with a 20mph limit. All of Spain is moving towards 30kmh on all urban and suburban roads. Edinburgh has decided to extend 20mph zones to cover 80% of the city (this includes the entire city centre). 38% of the Swiss population live in 30kmh zones. All these countries already have less road deaths per head of population than Australia, and with their move towards proven safer speeds the gap will surely widen. The move to lower speeds is not always popular, and in Australia it does not seem to be recognised as a most important single factor of the solution to a lower road toll.

In Australia we often hear the argument that cars cannot drive at that low speed, and that drivers that have to drive slowly will become frustrated, bored or lose focus. Looking at the wholesale introduction of lower speed limits in urban areas in Europe, I wonder what makes Australian drivers so inept.

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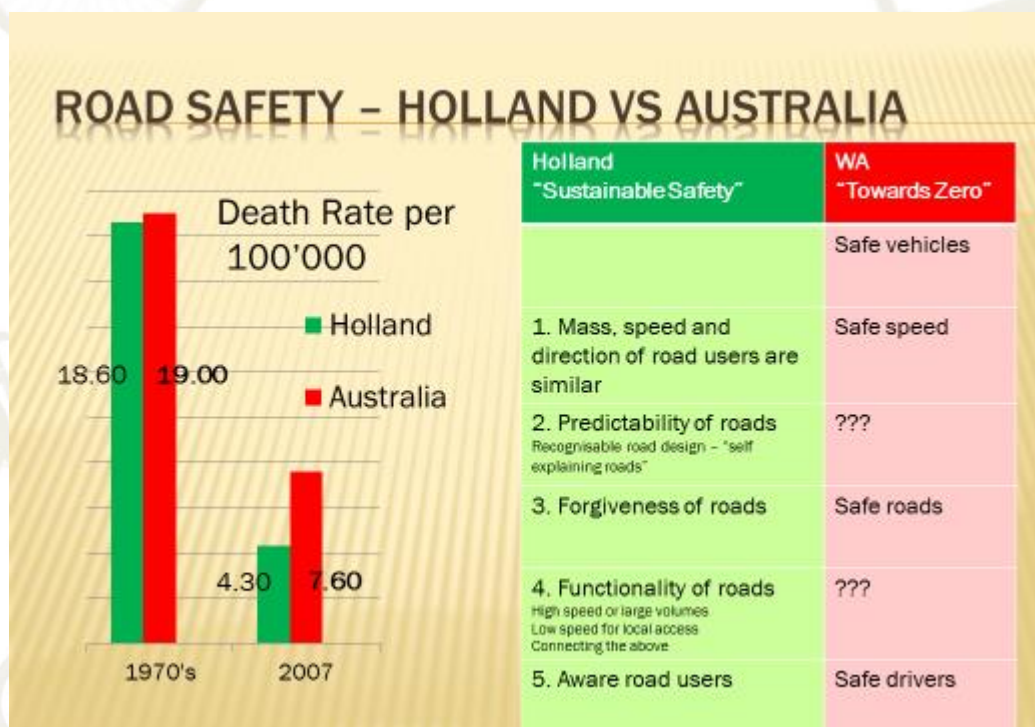
Ill-conceived traffic calming

Local and state governments are still using traffic calming measures that make roads unsafe for people riding bicycles, for instance raised medium strips that leave insufficient space for a car to pass a bicycle with a safe passing distance of at least one meter, more when the person on a bicycle seems inexperienced, very young or very old. Australian standards insufficiently address methods for traffic calming that are effective, but not detrimental to people on bicycles.

Road Safety Strategy in Western Australia

A concern for people riding bicycles are road safety strategies, for instance the “Towards Zero” road safety strategy in Western Australia, that are in effect car centric, and appear focused on reducing incidents of motorists killing themselves or each other. Often they are “dressed up” to make the strategies appear people focused, but on closer scrutiny fail to deliver a “people first” outcome.

The importance of a people first strategy can be seen when comparing the Dutch and Australian road safety outcomes



The Dutch did not “naturally” embrace a people first strategy – it came as the result of a high death rate in the 1970's, nearly as high as the Australian death rates at the same time. The difference is clear – making roads safer for vulnerable road users reduces the overall road toll substantially.

Safe legalised minimum passing distance

To increase safety for people riding bicycles, a safe passing distance must become law Australia-wide. The minimum safe passing distance is one meter in the urban and suburban context, on roads with speeds not exceeding 60kmh, and at least 1.5 meters on roads with higher speeds.

Funding

Having a national consensus on the most effective road safety strategy is useful, but without funding these strategies cannot be implemented. To be effective, funding must be tied to outcomes, and one of the

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important outcomes would be the introduction of tangible measures to increase the mode share of people using a bicycle to travel to schools, train stations, shops and places of employment etc. A 10% cycling mode share for trips to work as measured by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in the Census should be the minimum target. A higher mode share of people cycling and walking instead of using a car will reduce the road toll, as well as saving on health costs and reducing congestion. To achieve this, minimum funding required is at least 3% of the Federal and States transport budget.

Improvements to Driver Training and Assessment.

Driving Instructors

Certification for driving instructors needs to be improved at the national and state level. To be certified, driving instructors have to demonstrate knowledge of laws relating to vulnerable road users. The driver training curriculum has to include both theoretical and practical testing of cycling in a variety of road environments.

Heavy vehicle drivers

Heavy vehicle drivers have to ride a bicycle for one hour on the same types of roads they would drive their vehicles on. This is now done in London after years of cyclists being killed by left turning trucks, with both cyclists and truck drivers not equipped to allow for the blind spots in the truck drivers vision.

Dangerous drivers

Dangerous and distracted drivers are a major worry for people riding bicycles. In West Australia a driver, once s/he has passed his test, get his licence for life. If the driver accumulates enough demerit points, the licence gets suspended, but not taken away. We would like the following changes to licence rules:

- When a driver has accumulated enough demerit points, his licence gets cancelled. To get it back he will have to pass the driver's test again, and be subject to the same conditions as any other person taking the test, including supervised driving and the probationary period with zero alcohol. This will give him/her the opportunity to become aware of all relevant rules and regulations, and establish new better driving habits.
- On licence renewal (at least every five years) an online test is administered before the renewal gets processed.
- If a driver loses his/her licence more than once, a compulsory psychological assessment determines if he has the attitude and temperament required to drive a motor vehicle.
- Where a driver exceeds the speed limit by more than 50%, the fine is a fixed amount plus an additional penalty based on the taxable income of the driver.
- Hoon driving and habitual offending by car: cars are not only impounded, but are crushed.

Cycling specific laws and regulations

- All cyclists, irrespective of age, should be able to avoid dangerous road situations by riding on footpaths. There is no evidence that bicycle riding on footpaths endangers pedestrians, as pedestrians are always prioritised.
- Mandatory Helmet Laws (MHL) for cyclists are abolished. Experience has shown that these laws reduce cycling participation (less cyclist on the roads equals more cycling crashes, as it becomes less expected for the motorist to encounter a cyclist), and in jurisdictions where MHL's have been relaxed (Northern Territory) the injury rates for cyclists have not increased.
- The introduction of "strict liability" legislation, similar to the concepts used in Holland. When a person driving a car hits a pedestrian, s/he must prove that they have done nothing wrong. If the

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person hit is less than 12 years old, the driver is automatically assumed to be at fault. Currently it is up to the cyclist to prove that the car driver is in the wrong. Even with video evidence the police tend to be reluctant to press charges against the car driver.