

Freestyle Cyclists Inc. shares BISA's goal of increasing investment in cycling infrastructure. Relaxing mandatory helmet laws goes hand-in-hand with this goal, by shifting the focus around cycling safety to the transport environment.

Promoting transport cycling delivers substantial benefits to the whole community; up to 50% reduction in heart disease rates for regular transport cyclists, less pollution, less traffic congestion, increased patronage of local businesses. Cycling for transport saves the economy money, and makes us all healthier.

However while 26% of commuter journeys in Adelaide are 5km or less, only around 2% of commuter journeys are made by bike. The largest untapped pool of potential riders is the roughly 60% of the population in the "Interested but Concerned" category. These people are discouraged by the perception that cycling is difficult and dangerous.

Cycling is actually extremely safe (only 3-4 fatalities per year in SA, of around 56 million journeys). Numerous studies show the health benefits save 10 - 20 lives for each life lost in cycling accidents.

In short, the perception of danger in cycling is a bigger problem than the danger itself.

Because they currently apply to all cyclists in all circumstances, helmet laws make cycling look inherently dangerous. This in turn makes building infrastructure look somewhat futile, and discourages people from using the infrastructure that does exist.

In truth, helmets are the last line of defence, useful when all else fails, but you don't really want to need them. Infrastructure and reduced speed limits are the first line of defence to protect cyclists. Yet for almost thirty years governments have had things back-to-front - treating helmets like the first line of defence, and neglecting infrastructure.

There is good reason to believe that relaxing/repealing MHLs (at least in low-risk environments) will encourage more people to ride bicycles for transport. The highest cycling rates in Australia are enjoyed in the NT, ACT, and WA, where the per-capita number of helmet fines issued are also lowest. The NT (where helmet use is optional for adults on off-road paths) also enjoys the nation's best example of gender parity in cycling rates, and serious cycling injuries in the NT are the nation's lowest as a percentage of all serious transport injuries.

In late 2017 Bicycle Network conducted a survey into attitudes to mandatory helmet laws. Almost 20,000 people responded. The results included;

- 30.4% would ride more if helmets weren't mandatory
- 58.3% of respondents said there should be a change to helmet laws
- 40.7% said helmet laws should only apply to young people, or in high-risk circumstances

Relaxing/repealing helmet laws is about recognising the injustice of penalising an activity that is good for society. But it's also about shifting the perception of cycling in the wider public from "extreme sport" to "sensible transport", and shifting the perception of cyclists from "lycra warriors" to "wheeled pedestrians".

Pushing for a relaxation in MHLs is part and parcel of telling politicians that cycling is not a dangerous activity, and that the cycling environment is what really matters.