



Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle User Group

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The Right Honourable Graham Quirk
Lord Mayor of Brisbane City
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My Dear Lord Mayor

This letter calls for Council to address its sub-optimal approach to the following two issues that are causing risk for people riding bikes in Brisbane's inner western suburbs:

- 1) Council's refusal to provide protected space for people riding bikes along Sylvan Road, Toowong; and
- 2) the sub-standard cycling infrastructure Council installed as part of its Toowong to Indooroopilly Commuter bikeway project.

Sylvan Road lack of protected space for people riding bikes

Despite Sylvan Road being the principal connector between the Western Bikeway and the busiest bikeway in Brisbane, the Bicentennial Bikeway, this thoroughfare continues to present dangerous conditions for people riding bikes because of the absence of safe space for cycling.

Our specific requests are as follows:

- That Council's decision to "do nothing" concerning Sylvan Road should immediately be reviewed in the light of information that injury rates are in fact increasing rather than decreasing, and in light of your decision to remove peak hour car parking on Annerley Road in favour of bike lanes;
- In view of the current Coronial inquest into the death of Rebekka Meyer, Council to prohibit the use of "truck and dog" trailers on this road as it is a critical cycling corridor;
- All further bikeway construction should take note of the guidance in Technical Note 128 of Transport and Main Roads on "Selection and Design of Cycle Tracks".

As some councillors appear to not understand the issues involved, we invite Councillor Peter Matic and others to ride Sylvan Road and the Toowong to Indooroopilly bikeway with the three CBD BUG co-convenors during the morning peak hour.

The CBD BUG is greatly dismayed by Council's decision to do nothing concerning safety and amenity for people riding bicycles on Sylvan Road, Toowong, despite the third largest petition ever presented to Council (763 signatures).¹

This road contains a few dozen car parks that appear to be used largely by commuters rather than residents or people visiting businesses. Their needs seem to be considered more important by Council than the safety or amenity of the 1,600 people riding bikes on this road daily. Their needs were also considered more important than the needs of the even greater number who would ride along this corridor if separation was provided from traffic.

This approach is totally at odds with the parking priorities identified in the report of the Brisbane Parking Taskforce that you established. Recommendation 1 in this report was that Council adopt “parking prioritisation lists to guide the allocation of kerbside space based on key priorities” and that irrespective of the location in Brisbane the top two priorities would be: 1) safety, and 2) alternative and sustainable transport.

Council’s reply² to the aforementioned e-petition calling for protected bike lanes along Sylvan Road stated **“Parking demand and on-road parking stress is particularly high on Sylvan Road.”** This is a completely subjective statement, which allowed Council to arrive at its apparently preordained decision. No evidence of a quantitative assessment of the claimed “parking pressure” was presented, and the reply provided no objective assessment of the “balance” Councillor Matic spoke of. It is clear to the CBD BUG that if cycling is really to grow at a rate commensurate with the targets you have set, provision will have to be made along many corridors where it is currently lacking.

In contrast to the lack of data on parking demand, injury figures and cyclist counts were provided in the response.

Council’s reply was essentially that protected lanes would only be considered if injury rates of people riding bikes increase, with the implicit assumption that the current level of injuries is acceptable. The volume of cars and bikes needed to calculate these rates appears not to have been taken into account, nor was a methodology provided. The needs of those who would like to cycle but currently do not feel safe are not being considered. Council’s policy is often limited to encouraging people to ride bikes rather than enabling them through protected infrastructure.

One reason given for “doing nothing” on Sylvan Road was that “crash data” from the Department of Transport of Main Road’s “WebCrash” database indicated the crash rate was trending downwards. Cr Helen Abrahams in her speech supporting the lanes noted that casualty data was only current to June 2012 (three years out of date). As the current treatment was only put in place in 2011, we contend that insufficient time has passed to make the claims presented in your response, especially given the stochastic nature, and acknowledged under-reporting of traffic crashes involving people riding bicycles.

There were four hospitalisations involving bicycles and cars (multi-vehicle crashes) on Sylvan Road in the TMR data from January 2001 to September 2013 (12 years 9 months) - in August 2002, November 2004, March 2007, and July 2008. More details are available at http://www.unorthodox.com.au/map/what_hits_bikes/ and <https://data.qld.gov.au/dataset/crash-data-from-queensland-roads>

Since then, three hospitalisations of females riding bikes hit by cars on Sylvan Road in 2014-2015 (15 May 2014, 4 August 2014, 11 June 2015) were not considered in Council officers’ analysis.

Looking at Twitter and Brisbane Cyclist there have been three people riding bikes (all female) taken to hospital in the 21 months since the end of the TMR data period (October 2013 to June 2015) and these are just the ones of whom the CBD BUG is aware. This is of particular concern as only 10% of people riding bikes in the morning peak are female.

The problem is not just about actual incidents - these databases don’t capture the “near misses” which do so much to discourage people from riding there.³

² http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150605_-_council_-_minutes_-_ordinary_-_26_may_2015.doc

³

<https://twitter.com/QldAmbulance/status/609130675405373441>
<https://twitter.com/QldAmbulance/status/467164996687118336>
<https://twitter.com/GettrafficQLD/status/496422217102540800>
<http://www.brisbanecyclist.com/forum/topics/sylvan-rd-grievances?id=4154450%3ATopic%3A55211&page=21>

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In contrast, the University of Queensland encourages all road users to report near misses.⁴ In the 8 July 2015 Westside News story Dr Tamara Fletcher noted that near misses are not considered or reported by Council. Council appears to be relying on poor data in the assessment of these issues.



Another car / bicycle collision occurred on 6 March 2014.⁵

Concerning the traffic island on Land St the CBD BUG questions why separation is considered necessary here between lines of motor vehicles, but not on Sylvan Road where people on bikes form the barrier between parked cars and motor vehicle traffic?

As part of his response to the petition, Cr Matic stated in Council that **“protected bike lanes of a physical form are something that is relevant to other jurisdictions but not currently in Australia”**.

We draw your attention to the images on the following page that show protected bike lanes in Chelmer, Kangaroo Point and in the Brisbane CBD.⁶



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<http://www.pf.uq.edu.au/cycling/cyclesmart-cyclesafe/>

5

<https://twitter.com/coolbutuseless/status/441715158948118530>

6

<https://twitter.com/cbdbug/status/608829223071932416>

There are further examples in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth. The following images are a sample of those in Technical Note 128 of Queensland Transport and Main Roads showing such infrastructure in Australia.

Figure 16: Two-way cycle track and parking, Sydney (4.7 m total width)



Figure 18: Temporary cycle track with clearway during peak hour, Albert St, Melbourne



Figure 27: Contra-flow one-way cycle track, Perth



Source: Warren Solomon

We note that the current construction of the “Landmark” Apartments at 2-8 Land Street, Toowong involves the use of “truck and dog” trailers which are driven along Sylvan Road. One example is pictured below at the intersection of Jephson Street and Sylvan Road in August 2015. Note that the wheels of the truck and trailer have entered the bike lane.



As CBD BUG Co-convenor Paul French commented at the Coroner’s inquest into the death of Rebekka Meyer, killed by a truck and dog trailer on 11 September 2014 in Woolloongabba, these vehicles are totally inappropriate for the urban environment. The blind spot from the cabin can be up to seven metres. The following picture was taken at 131 Sylvan Road, where the lane width is 2.8 metres. Even the pictured light utility vehicle was crossing into the shoulder. The truck width is from 2.3 to 2.5 metres and thus with side mirrors added it does not fit within the marked traffic lane.

The construction management plan (Brisbane City Council Planning and Development Online Reference A003775550) for the apartments states that “the entire project team involved in the project are committed to maximising safety for the local community; *including but not limited to vehicular and pedestrian traffic passing by the site, construction works and the general public.*” Given this commitment, the fact that Sylvan Road is a key cycling corridor, the fact that these trucks do not even fit within a lane as pictured, and the recent revelations at the inquest, we request that such trucks be prohibited from using Sylvan Road in the interests of public safety.



Finally, **one of the reasons Sylvan Road has so many crashes is that it runs East West.** In autumn and late winter / early spring, the setting sun is directly at eye level, just above the horizon, at peak hour. So people in cars with dirty windscreens can't see people on bikes at all.

A CBD BUG member recently observed a car pull out of the rugby club car park to head west on Sylvan Road. Because the driver was looking directly into the setting sun, they didn't see the eastbound car which ultimately T-boned them. How can motorists see people on bicycles if they can't see cars?

This is yet another good reason, combined with the usage and latent demand, which justifies separate and protected infrastructure on Sylvan Road.

Toowong to Indooroopilly Commuter Bikeway Response

The on-road portions of this project appear to have been completed. The issue of greatest concern in this project is the Gailey Five Ways roundabout work. The bike lane placement ignores the Austroads recent report on roundabouts and the Queensland Road Rule changes resulting from the Parliamentary Inquiry meaning people riding bikes no longer need to keep left as far as practical when approaching a roundabout.

Department of Transport and Main Roads' Technical Note 128 "Selection and Design of Cycle Tracks" quotes the Austroads Research Report AP-R461-14 on "Assessment of the Effectiveness of On-Road Bicycle Lanes at Roundabouts in Australia and New Zealand" as follows. *The speed most relevant to cyclists is the roundabout negotiation (or maximum entry design) speed. To achieve equitable speeds with cyclists, a negotiation speed of 25 km/h is desirable, and 30 km/h should be the maximum permissible (refer to Table 1). From a cyclist's perspective, high speed might be defined as a negotiation speed of 40 km/h and above.*

The CBD BUG wishes to know how the negotiation speed of the roundabout is to be restricted to 25-30 km/h given that the speed limit on the arms of the roundabout is either 50 or 60 km/h and motor vehicle traffic is coming downhill from Swann Road. We would also like to know if any negotiation speeds have been tested or measured before or after the new lanes were marked. For

example, a recent drive through the roundabout by a BUG member in a safe manner resulted in entering from Gailey Road at 30 km/h and exiting onto Swann Road at 35 km/h.

Apart from the addition of green paint, nothing else appears to have changed. The Technical Note also states that *“To safely provide for bicycle riders at roundabouts, bicycle lanes marked within the circulating space should be avoided on new roundabouts. International research has shown that marking bicycle lanes within the circulating space is more dangerous than providing no explicit bicycle provision due to increased number of conflict points.”* Although the new lanes are marked only on the approach rather than in the circulating space, they encourage people riding bikes to keep to the left while entering the roundabout, ignoring the recent Queensland Road Rule changes.

For example, motor vehicles turning left into Swann Road will be looking right for vehicles coming up the hill from Gailey Road, not left where the bicycle lane is marked. We are also concerned with the positioning of the taxi zone on the uphill section of Indooroopilly Road approaching the Gailey Five Ways roundabout. We note that contrary to your response concerning the bikeway, consultation occurred only on the route and not concerning the form the bikeway was to take. Construction began immediately after documents were published on the Council website and no opportunity was given for community feedback.

Finally, the following photograph shows how the green paint near Westerham Street, rather than providing “protected space” for people riding bikes, is now merely being used as car parking space for motor vehicles.



We look forward to your response on these issues.

Yours faithfully

Dr Richard Bean
Co-convenor, CBD BUG
28 August 2015