

## Bicycle riding in the parks and gardens of Melbourne City Council

November 2009



## **Bicycle use in Parks and Gardens**

Responsible bike riding is acceptable in parks and gardens.

There are a number of legitimate reasons for riding a bike in a park or garden.

- Family play and low key recreation including riding with children and learning to ride.  
This use is recognised implicitly in the current rules that exempt child riders and adults.
- Transport to the park as a destination.  
The City recognises that ‘informal recreation’ takes place in its ‘Gardens’. The Masterplans do not recognise that people might get to the anticipated ‘informal games’ by bicycle.
- Transport routes across the area.  
The Masterplans for the Gardens do not recognise that these areas of public space sit across well established and attractive transport routes for walkers and bike riders. The Treasury Gardens for example is heavily used by walkers heading to the CBD from the MCG and Jolimont Station.

These types of low key riding do not threaten the character of the parks and gardens.

- The paths in parks and gardens are generally twice as wide as those on the ‘normal’ bike path system. Paths through the Carlton Gardens for example are 5.4m wide.
- The usage of the paths is low. The current use by riders, according to the Council, is around one rider every four and half minutes in the Carlton Gardens.

Use of the paths by riders – in particular at night – adds to the passive surveillance and therefore personal security of other path users.

We recognise that the City may not wish to develop high volume bicycle routes through areas designated as Gardens.

- We believe that through riding can be minimised without a ban.
- We are strongly of the view that a ban is unlikely to modify the number of riders using a park or garden.

In order to modify the behaviour of bike riders the City needs to develop a workable and consistent policy for select transport routes through Gardens, especially those that are attractive to riders.

## **The City's policies and actions are not consistent**

The parks and gardens division of the City of Melbourne supports bike riding in areas that designated as 'Parks'. This policy has been reflected in management documents and in the City's bike plans. As a result shared use paths have been developed for example in Royal, Yarra and Princes Parks.

The City of Melbourne supports bike riding in areas that designated as 'Gardens'. The shared path through the Alexandra Gardens between the Yarra Trail and Princes Bridge operates effectively and without friction between the users. The City has recently completed a shared bike path through the Queen Victoria Gardens.

The Council behaves as if there is an overarching policy that distinguishes between Parks and Gardens and that bans bike riding in 'Gardens'. The Connected City Committee Report says 'While cycling is prohibited in most of Melbourne's gardens, it is generally allowed along designated paths in Melbourne's parks including Yarra Park, Fawkner Park and Royal Park. Council has previously made a distinction between the activities allowed in gardens and parks within the municipality.' Councillors should be aware that there is no such policy on the City website.

The 'Gardens' distinction outlined in the report is not consistent with the facts. It says 'Parks have a simpler horticultural presentation and are used for more active recreational pursuits such as formal and informal sporting events and contests. Parks also have lengthy linear paths that are very well suited to joggers, walkers and cyclists.' This description fits the northern end of the Carlton Gardens. The Carlton Gardens Masterplan says gardens are for 'passive recreation' but permits soccer and basketball games. Gardens are kept for 'small-scale community events' but the Melbourne International Flower and Garden Show is permitted.

If a general Gardens policy is to be the basis of regulations, by laws, penalties and enforcement, a consistent policy should be developed and published.

This policy should be based on evidence gathered on the use of the gardens including by riders. There have been, over the years, a number of assertions made about bike riding that are not supported by the facts. For example in October 2003 Cnr Redwood said on behalf of the Council "Last Monday, our rangers recorded 313 cyclists between 8am and 9am entering, bypassing or attempting to use Carlton Gardens as a shortcut....some continue to use Melbourne's garden paths as a cyclists' CityLink," she said... It's only a matter of time before someone is seriously hurt.'

Councillors will note that there have been no serious injuries since 2003 and that, despite a significant increase in rider numbers in general; the number of riders in the Carlton Gardens has dropped since 2003 from 313 in one hour to 40 in three hours.

The City's unsuccessful attempt to implement a general ban on bike riding in Gardens has been arbitrary and inconsistent.

- Although action has been taken to develop one alternative to the southbound route through the Carlton Gardens, there has been no systematic network wide effort to develop alternatives to cross park travel.
- There has been no consistent education program. Non standard advisory and regulatory signage has been installed at some locations and not others.
- Enforcement has been characterised by spasmodic attempts to impose penalties on riders who use the paths through the gardens.
- The penalties have been disproportionate and have undermined community support for the Council.

## **A proposed solution**

We suggest the following approach:

### **Definition**

The Council develops a definition of a garden area and the appropriate activities in it. This definition should be public, clear, consistent and based on evidence.

### **Restricted zones**

The Council identifies areas in parks and gardens where it is appropriate for uses to be more restricted, areas with elaborate horticultural features for example. These could be called restricted zones.

### **Shared path alignments**

The Council identifies shared path alignments. These alignments will identify where riders can use the paths for the three types of bike riding described above. The alignments may pass through what is otherwise a restricted zone.

This work has been done for some Parks and Gardens already.

### **Alternatives for walking and riding for transportation**

The Council identifies practical alternative transport alignments and improves them – especially by separating them from traffic – so that the alternatives provide a more attractive route for transport riders than the route through the Garden.

This work has been done to some extent, and with some success, for the Carlton Gardens.

Bicycle Victoria's support for the development of alternatives is long standing.

### **Education and enforcement**

If this approach is taken, Bicycle Victoria will support education and reasonable enforcement measures to control irresponsible bike riding in parks and gardens.

## Background

There is a long history of bike riding in the area of the Carlton Gardens. The area used to be a centre for bike racing. Huge crowds watched races at a cycle track between the Eastern Annex and the main Exhibition Building.



*The Australian Natives' Association's wheel race, Exhibition Building, Melbourne, Foundation Day 1897. Source: Australian Unity Limited Archives Melbourne*

In 2003 Bicycle Victoria sought through the introduction of a new Masterplan to remove the ban on bike riding in the Carlton Gardens.

In October 2003 Bicycle Victoria wrote to members as follows:

City of Melbourne is reviewing the Masterplan for Carlton Gardens and are inviting comments for an issue paper. Get your comment in now.

Tell everyone you know to do the same - support safe cycling in Carlton Gardens.

We'll be asking that cycling be allowed on the wider paths including the path from Gertrude to Queensberry.

We will also be asking that commuter routes around the park be upgraded - eg remove parking from west side of Nicholson St to allow exclusive bike path along east side of gardens and improve the Rathdowne St lanes and connection from Canning St to both.

We will oppose the proposed ban on cyclists in Gardens but will support measures to educate and enforce against unsafe cycling - cyclists will have to give way to pedestrians and control speeds on any shared path.

Get your comments in now!

Our efforts to prevent the ban were unsuccessful.

In 2005 we said in our submission to the Masterplan that the wide boulevards in the Gardens offer 'an attractive route for many cyclists and we believe that cycling can be managed in the gardens and safe use for all garden users, including cyclists, can be promoted.'

We reaffirmed our opposition to the ban on bike riding as well as our support for a management regime introduced to ensure cyclists that use the gardens do so appropriately including at an appropriate speed and giving way to all pedestrians.

We asked for the upgrade of commuter routes around the gardens including remove parking from west side of Nicholson St; improving Rathdowne Street and Exhibition Street and the connection from Canning Street to both Nicholson and Rathdowne.

The Masterplan recommended that the Council ‘significantly improve bike route connections along Rathdowne Street and the shared pathway on Nicholson Street to improve the link from Canning Street through Carlton to the CBD.’

We also asked that commuter routes around the gardens be upgraded including the exclusive bike path along east side of the Carlton Gardens as well as improvements to the Rathdowne St lanes and connections from Canning St to both.

On 5 July 2005, City of Melbourne Council's Planning and Environment Committee recommended that Council approve a 6-month trial within the Carlton, Fitzroy and Treasury Gardens to permit cycling by children under the age of 12, where accompanied by an adult, providing that all such cyclists obey all other park regulations such as speed limits and relevant signage.

This rule remains in place.

In 2009 the City of Melbourne launched an unexpected blitz of riders. The Council had done no formal study of park user behaviour to support this intervention. The Council requested the Victoria Police to detain riders while Council staff issued fines of \$250 – a higher penalty than applies to road users who go through a red light.