



**BICYCLE
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We've got your back

Footpath riding

Brief position statement



Prepared by: Dr Nicholas Hunter

Position: Research and Policy Advisor

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Bicycle Network acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respects to the first peoples of this country, their culture and elders, past, present and emerging.

Who we are

Bicycle Network is one of the leading member-based bike riding organisations in the world. We are committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians by making it easier for people to ride a bike.

Operating nationally, we have a measurable, successful and large-scale impact in community participation and the promotion of healthy lifestyles through bike riding.

We achieve this through:

- improving the bike riding environment by working with government at all levels to provide better infrastructure, legislation, data, policies and regulations
- delivering successful, large-scale behaviour change programs such as Ride2School and Ride2Work
- providing services and insurance that support bike riders through nationwide membership
- running mass participation bike riding events such as the Great Vic Bike Ride
- being a key national spokesperson on issues related to cycling and physical activity

Bicycle Network can assist the Victorian Government in scoping and targeting achievable outcomes for bike riding and other forms of active travel. If you need our help to build bike rider patronage in Victoria, please contact us.

Dr Nicholas Hunter

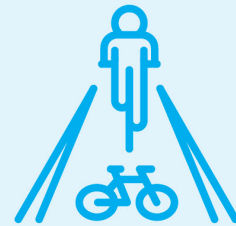
Research and Policy Advisor

nicholash@bicyclenetwork.com.au

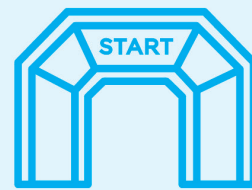
Craig Richards

Chief Executive Officer

craigr@bicyclenetwork.com.au



Nearly 50,000 members



150,000 event participants since 2012



**Providing bike services
to 125 councils and shires**



**Providing parking for
over 2250 bike riders each day**



**Promoting active travel at
over 1800 schools since 2007**



Executive Summary

In Victoria and New South Wales, children are able to ride on footpaths (and adults with a child in tow), whereas all other riders are restricted from using footpaths for travel. In all other states and territories, footpath riding is legal for all ages.

Bicycle Network addresses this difference by reviewing evidence pertaining to the following questions:

- what are the risks to people walking and riding bikes when the footpath is shared?
- what is evidence for bike riding uptake in states with footpath riding restrictions?
- what are the attitudes of existing riders?
- are the NSW and VIC road networks safe and hospitable environments for riders?

Based on the existing evidence, we take the following position on footpath riding rules in Victoria and New South Wales:

1. People under the age of 16 years should be permitted to ride their bike on footpaths in local streets and minor roads.
2. People of all ages should be permitted to ride their bike on footpaths on main roads, state roads, arterials and national highways, subject to the following conditions:
 - the posted speed limit is 50kph or greater;
 - there are no existing on-road or off-road bicycle facilities available to the rider; or
 - unless otherwise signposted or there are clear location-specific reasons not to do so (e.g. high volumes of pedestrian traffic).
3. An accompanying speed limit (15kph) should be considered for people riding a bike on a footpath.



Finding the best passage

Riding a bike is an enjoyable transport option with a diverse range of economic, health and societal benefits. While most local and federal governments have long-term strategies for rolling out purpose-built bike networks, we must also ensure that our means of moving around on a bike are safe and stress-free in the short term.

The rules regarding the riding of bikes on footpaths (hereafter referred to as ‘footpath riding’) vary across Australian states and territories. In most parts of Australia, people of all ages are allowed to ride on the footpath. In Victoria and New South Wales, the rules are slightly different. Children are able to ride on footpaths, and adults with a young child in a child seat or ‘tagalong’ extension attached to their bike. All other riders are restricted from using footpaths for travel.

The footpath riding debate continues in these states and primarily centers on the safety of both pedestrians and riders. For example, the Legislative Council Economy and Infrastructure Committee’s (LCEIC)

recently conducted its Inquiry into Victoria’s Road Toll¹, and were told that Victorian riders need to be moved off footpaths, primarily in the interest of pedestrian safety but also to safeguard riders from overhanging vegetation and poor surface conditions.

There are a lot of factors that must be considered for developing policy, from safety risks to expected mode share. In this document, we review our position on all-ages footpath riding in Victoria and New South Wales by addressing several important questions:

- what are the risks to people walking and riding bikes when the footpath is shared?
- what is evidence for bike riding uptake in states with footpath riding restrictions?
- what are the attitudes of existing riders?
- are the NSW and VIC road networks safe and hospitable environments for riders?

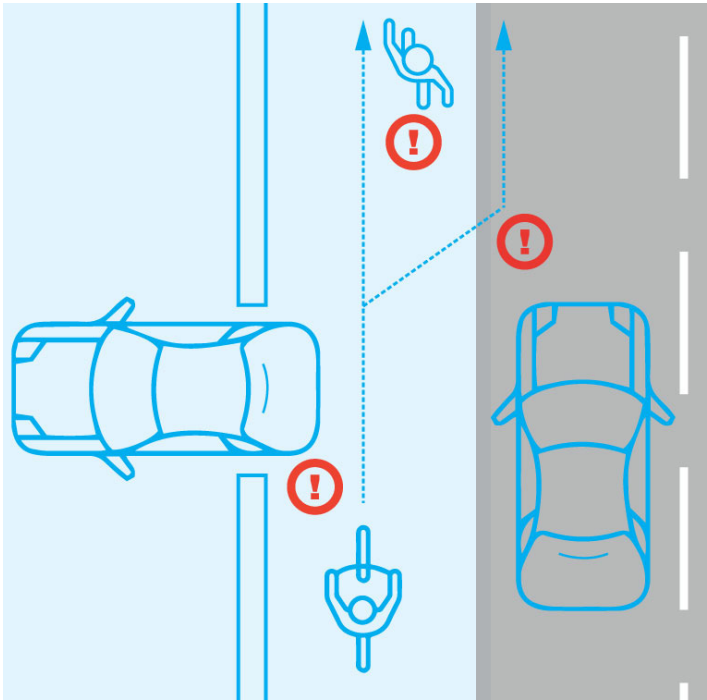
State	Related laws
VIC	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children (<13 years) are allowed to ride on footpaths.• Adults may ride on footpaths when carrying or supervising a child or disabled adult
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children (<16 years) are allowed to ride on footpaths.• Adults may ride on footpaths when carrying or supervising a child
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and adults may ride on footpaths where signposted• Riders must keep left and give appropriate warning to pedestrians when passing
SA, WA, TAS, NT, ACT	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Children and adults may ride on footpaths unless posted otherwise• Riders must give appropriate warning to pedestrians when passing

How common are footpath crashes?

The take-home message

Riding on a footpath can be hazardous, due to potential collisions with vehicles exiting driveways and collision with on-road traffic where riders leave the footpath (right). However, Australian studies have found that the prevalence of these crash types are low. The injuries sustained from a footpath crash are also comparatively less severe than those of an on-road crash.

Most crashes occurring on the footpath are due to a rider fall (i.e. single vehicle crash). Collisions between pedestrians and bikes do occur, however their likelihood is much lower than other environments where they share the space (e.g. shared paths).



The evidence

- Studies from the US and Canada suggest that footpaths are considered a hazardous site for riding a bike 1.8 to 16 times the risk of riding on the road². However, many studies have found that the injuries sustained are much less serious than those of on-road crashes³⁻⁵.
- In Australia, the crash risks are different⁶. Risk estimates from a study in Victoria that riding on the road is three times more dangerous than on the footpath⁷.
- The most common police-reported crashes amongst child and adolescent riders in Victoria involve (i) collisions with cars when riders shift from footpaths to roads, or (ii) collisions with cars emerging from driveways⁸.
- Another Victorian study found that the majority of serious rider injuries occur on-road (71%) and predominantly involve male riders with 10+ years of experience⁹. Footpath crashes involving serious injury are very low by comparison^{6,10}.
- In a Queensland study, where all-age footpath riding is legal, about 5.8 per cent of collisions occurred on footpaths⁶. Of these, 9.7 per cent involved a pedestrian, which translates to 0.6 per cent of all crashes recorded in the study. The study also found that nearly twice as many bike-pedestrian collisions occur on bike paths.
- In the Australian Capital Territory, where all-age footpath riding is also legal, only 2 per cent of crashes involve a footpath-based collision¹¹. In a study of 202 crashes, only one case was recorded involving a footpath crash and where serious injuries were sustained¹¹.
- There are a small number of bike-pedestrian collisions where the pedestrian has died as a result of the impact¹². In almost all cases, these collisions occurred on the road.

Are footpath laws barriers to riding a bike?

The take-home message

A repeal or relaxation of footpath riding laws is unlikely to result in widespread uptake of bike riding. National bike datasets suggest that, in states where footpath riding rules have been relaxed, there has not been an overall growth in ridership¹³ (right).

These data have two implications: (i) that all-age footpath riding restrictions in New South Wales and Victoria are unlikely to be a major barrier to riding a bike; and (ii) if rules were to be relaxed it is unlikely that footpaths will be inundated by large amounts of people riding bikes.

Rather, it is more likely that people with less bike riding experience, or less confidence in sharing the road, will resort to riding on a footpath.

The data



The evidence

- Data from the Australian Participation Survey in both Western Australia¹³ and South Australia¹⁴, and from Bicycle Network's Super Counts program, suggest that there has been no increase in bike activity following the relaxation of footpath riding rules.
- In Victoria, a telephone survey by Drummond¹⁵ found that 17 per cent of respondents who had never used a bike would do so if footpath riding was legalised in their state.
- A survey in Queensland, where all-age footpath riding is legal, found that people new to bike riding are more likely to use a footpath than existing riders^{6,16,17}.

What are the attitudes of existing riders?

The take-home message

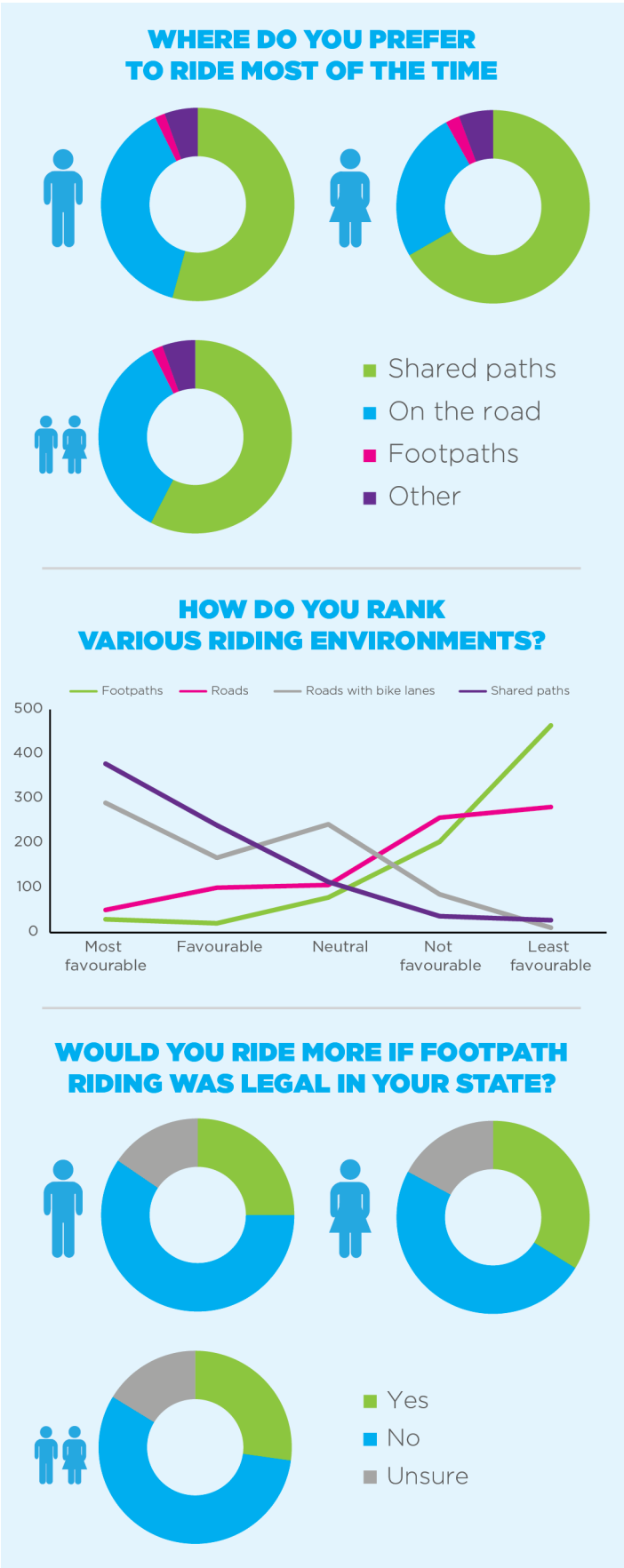
There are mixed perceptions on the favourability of footpaths for riding, depending on experience and setting. Approximately 27 per cent of Bicycle Network members said they would ride more if footpath riding was legal in their state. However, footpaths are generally not favoured compared to other types of facility, such as shared paths. This implies that, for a small cohort of existing riders, footpaths may be helpful additional options for completing a bike trip, despite not being the most desirable facility.

Overall, it appears unlikely that footpaths will be used extensively for trips by existing riders. In some settings, footpaths provide a safe option for parts of the trip, such as at intersections without appropriate signal facilities and roads with busy traffic.

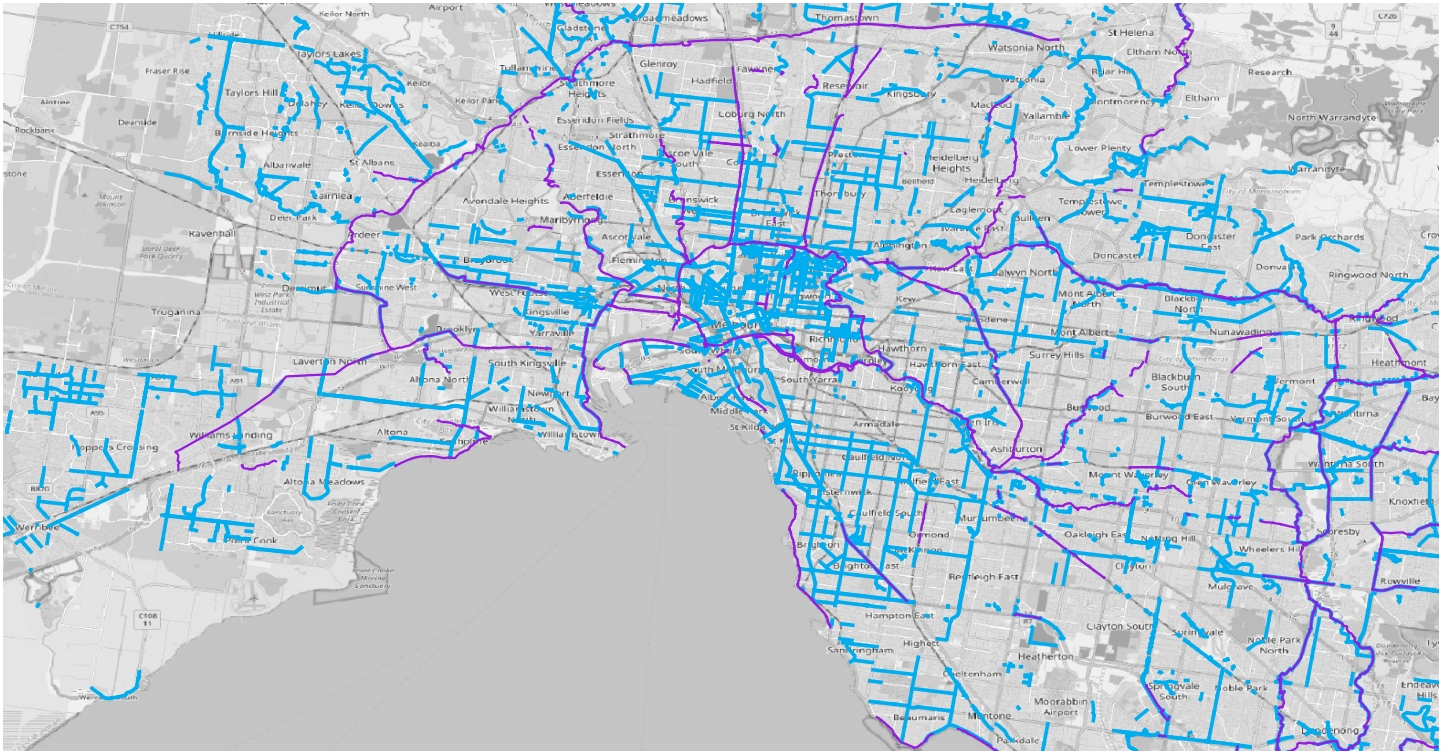
The evidence

- An online survey of Bicycle Network members found that 27 per cent would ride more if footpath riding was legalised in their state (right). However, it also found that, compared to other riding environments, footpaths were considered the least favourable.
- In a Queensland study, about 33.9 per cent reported riding on footpaths, two-thirds of which did so reluctantly⁴.
- Another Queensland study found that footpaths and off-road paths were perceived as the safest type of infrastructure by riders at unsignalised intersections¹⁶.

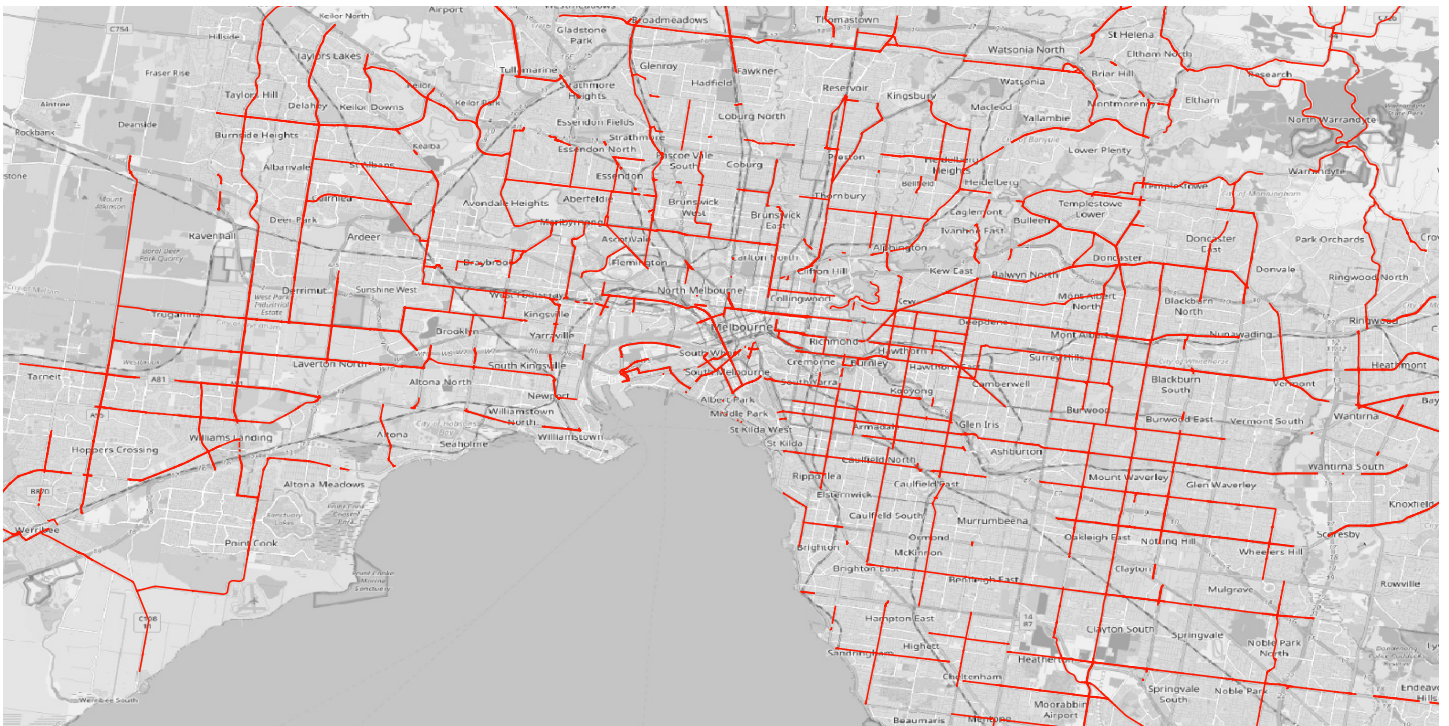
The data



Are our existing roads safe for bike use?



Both NSW and VIC are making concerted efforts to build safer and better-connected bike networks. Melbourne, for example, contains a vast array of on-road and off-road bike facilities (blue and purple lines above, respectively).



However, many Melbourne roads have no on-road bike treatments or adjacent off-road thoroughfares within reasonable distance. The map above shows roads (red) designated as 'primary' or 'secondary' arterial roads, with a posted speed limit of 50kph or higher, and no existing bike treatments. Some examples are further described on the following page.



◀ Barkers Road, Hawthorn

Barkers Road is a 60km/h road in Melbourne's east. It provides a main entrance to four primary and secondary schools, and is situated between two bike paths: the Anniversary Trail in the east; and the Main Yarra Trail in the west.

Lygon Street, Carlton North ▶

Lygon Street connects northern inner-city suburbs with the Carlton shopping district, schools, universities, and the CBD. There are no on-road bike treatments, which make riding very dangerous during peak periods.



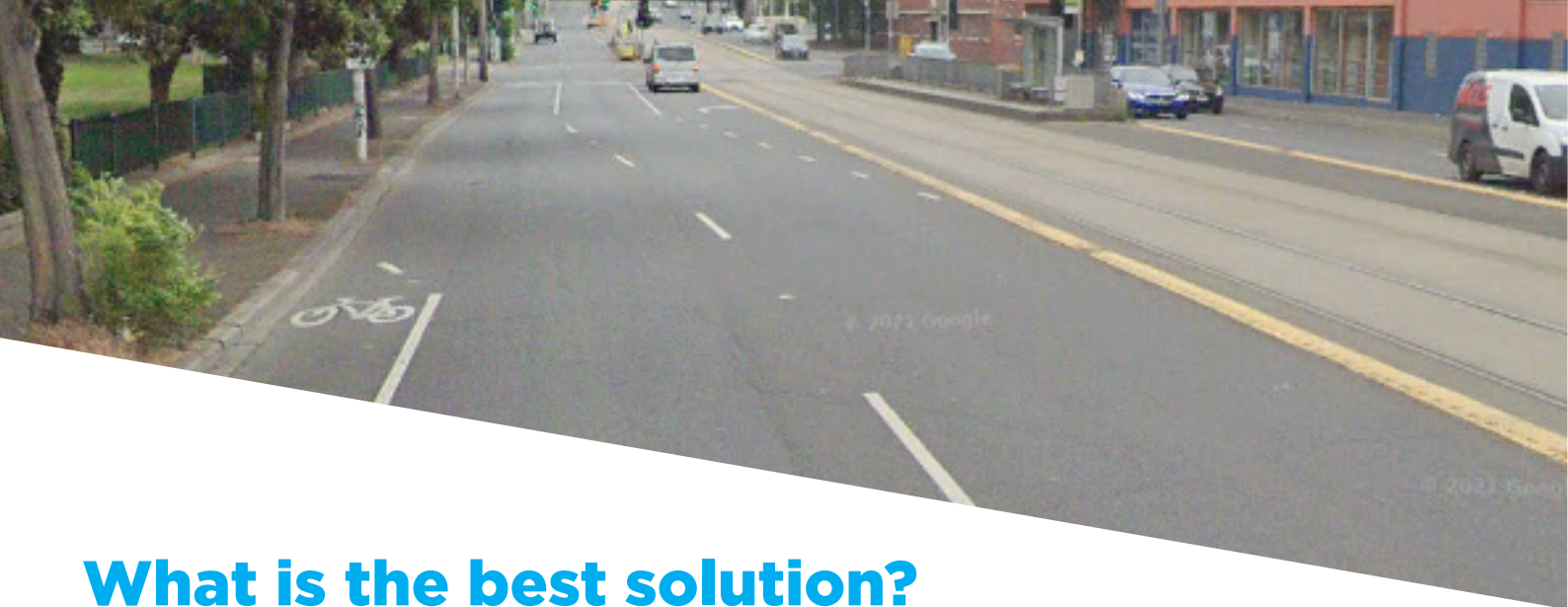
◀ Darebin Road, Thornbury

Darebin Road provides access to the Darebin Creek Trail, and goods and services in Ivanhoe. There are no bike treatments west of Station Street. The area leading to Darebin Creek Trail is mainly industrial, and footpaths are separated from driveways and car parks.

North Road, Oakleigh ▶

North Road is a key corridor to Monash University, park areas in Carnegie and Murrumbeena, and goods and services in Oakleigh and Clayton. The 60km/h untreated road is heavily congested during peak periods and accommodates several bus routes.





What is the best solution?

As we continually build our transport systems, we must ensure that all travelers have a safe passage throughout the entirety of their trips. We must accept that the bike networks across our cities are not yet fully connected. Where a bike lane ends, the road space it connects with may not be safe and hospitable for the wider range of people riding bikes. Indeed, this is where the majority of serious bikes crashes occur²⁰. We therefore need to think about the best and safest options for riders to complete their trips, without compromising the safety of others.

This is, arguably, the most pertinent question of the footpath riding debate: what is the change in safety risk to people using bikes and other road and path users, and is it effectively minimised? Predicting the crash exposure risks following a footpath riding legislation change is difficult, and previous modelling has failed to generate a robust result¹⁵. The reality is that no bike space is immune from crash risks, including footpaths. Research overwhelmingly suggests that bike facilities separated from vehicles remain the best option for reducing high severity crashes. However, in lieu of well-connected and separated bike networks that protect riders from high risk road spaces, footpaths may offer a safe alternative to busy high-speed roads, particularly for inexperienced riders.

However, we don't want to be simply shifting the risks. Many footpaths are situated adjacent to driveways, which research suggests is a high-frequency, low-severity crash risk that cannot be ignored. There are also risks of pedestrian-bike collisions on footpaths, particularly for elderly and impaired pedestrians. While this is a very low risk (in Melbourne, the total number of recorded collisions are relatively infrequent, are low in severity, and do not appear to be increasing with time²¹), we must accept that the risk exposure will evidently increase should footpath restrictions be lifted. Of the recorded fatalities resulting from bike-pedestrian collisions in Australia, the majority have involved older adults¹² and, along with children, are most at risk in a collision of this type²². Indeed, in Victoria people riding bikes are perceived by older adults as a barrier to walking²³.

On the topic of minimising pedestrian-rider conflict Austroads states that “holistic solutions are needed where conditions are improved for cyclists and/or pedestrians but not for one at the expense of the other”²⁴. Not all footpaths will be appropriate for bike use, and a wholesale easing of regulations may not be entirely appropriate for either patron. The best solution is to target areas where riding are simply too dangerous, particularly state roads with a high posted speed limit, high traffic density



and no existing bike infrastructure. In these cases, the on-road crash risk is likely to significantly outweigh the off-road crash risk for both riders and pedestrians. In settings where there are high volumes of people walking, treatments that allow both patrons to share the space should be prioritised. Similarly, if footpath riding rules were to be eased, complementary safety rules and behaviours, such as speed limits and bell use when overtaking, should be regulated just as they are on the roads. Many of these rules are already enforced in both Victoria and New South Wales. Safety education for children, involving components such as looking for vehicles, would also be a valuable intervention to complement riding rules.

An easing of footpath riding restrictions in Victoria and New South Wales may offer safer riding options, but they are unlikely to assist in increased bike uptake. Most existing riders prefer to use a designated bike path, and the existing research suggests that only a small proportion of people with no bike experience will take advantage of footpaths for riding. There is no suggestion that footpaths will be overrun by experienced riders. Rather, people with no previous riding experience are more likely to develop their skills on the footpath¹⁷.

The key driver for reviewing footpath riding rules is **protecting the few that are vulnerable**. There will be numerous environments where a rider may need to enter a busy traffic environment as part of their journey. There are vast swathes of road space that are currently unfit for bikes (page 8-9), and our current road rules force adults into these high-risk areas. We should consider footpaths as a temporary safe passage that riders may use to connect with the nearest path or bike facility.



Bicycle Network's position

Based on existing evidence, Bicycle Network takes the following position on footpath riding in Victoria and New South Wales:

1. People under the age of 16 years should be permitted to ride their bike on footpaths in local streets and minor roads.
2. People of all ages should be permitted to ride their bike on footpaths on main roads, state roads, arterials and national highways, subject to the following conditions:
 - the posted speed limit is 50kph or greater;
 - there are no existing on-road or off-road bicycle facilities available to the rider; or
 - unless otherwise signposted or there are clear location-specific reasons not to do so (e.g. high volumes of pedestrian traffic).

This allows the rider to avoid mixing with vehicle traffic and ensure a safe passage to the nearest available bike facility. In these cases, footpaths should be signposted and treated in a manner that accommodates shared path use between people walking and riding bikes.

3. An accompanying speed limit (15kph) should be considered for people riding a bike on a footpath.

Bicycle Network should make the following additional recommendations to state governments:

1. Invest in infrastructure that improves connectivity between footpaths and on-road bike lanes ('pinch points').
2. Separated bike infrastructure should be prioritised for corridors with high bike rider volumes and no existing treatments.
3. Fund interventions that promote safe footpath riding, including signalling to pedestrians when passing, and listening for cars and car horns.
4. Fund interventions that educate drivers on appropriate behaviours for interacting with footpath riders (e.g. looking for bikes and using a car horn when exiting a driveway).

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