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## Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle User Group

### CBD BUG

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The Brisbane CBD Bicycle User Group would like to make the following submission to the Senate Personal Choice and Community Impacts Inquiry – inquiry term of reference on Bicycle Helmet Laws (term d).

As background for you to this submission, the Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle User Group (CBD BUG) is a grass roots volunteer organisation of almost 800 members, representing the interests of the very large number of Brisbane residents who ride bicycles to, from and within the Brisbane CBD. It is active in vigorously seeking policy decisions at all levels of government supporting cycling, and in particular relating to improved infrastructure, end-of-trip facilities, integration of cycling with other transport modes and a cyclist-friendly regulatory environment. CBD BUG members meet monthly to exchange information and ideas, discuss issues of relevance and determine the direction of policies to benefit CBD cyclists.

The Brisbane CBD and surrounding suburbs contain Australia's largest bicycle sharing scheme, known as CityCycle. The Labor opposition has estimated the cost of the scheme to date at approximately \$20 million; if this estimate is correct, with approximately 1 million trips being made to date, this equates to approximately \$20 per trip. The usage rate has been very low compared to schemes of a similar size worldwide. This low usage rate is of great concern to the BUG. The BUG supports greater usage of the scheme, as it is a highly visible piece of cycling infrastructure, and is disappointed that it has become merely a "political football" in successive Council election campaigns. It is clear that one of the key reasons for this low usage rate is the mandatory helmet law in Queensland. Other reasons include the poor cycling infrastructure in Brisbane and the complicated sign-up process. The Council has made some improvements such as 24 hour hiring (December 2013), the re-opening of Riverwalk and the City Reach Boardwalk (September 2014 and September 2015), the linking of go cards to the bikes (April 2012) and providing courtesy helmets (August 2011). However, despite the operators offering discounts, promotions, competitions and bonus minutes for infrequently used stations, usage remains stubbornly low.

During the 2013 Parliamentary Inquiry into cycling, Brisbane Lord Mayor Graham Quirk suggested a trial exemption from Queensland's mandatory helmet law for people riding bikes off-road (that is, on the footpath, which is legal in Queensland for adults, or on off-road bicycle paths).<sup>1</sup> The Sunshine Coast City Council also suggested a similar trial.<sup>2</sup> Many other individual submissions to the inquiry supported such a trial or repeal of the laws (fifteen supported relaxation of the laws versus six supporting the current laws). The CBD BUG supported this exemption, as this is the same exemption that has existed in the Northern Territory since 1994.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/submissions/106\\_Brisbane%20City%20Council.pdf](https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/submissions/106_Brisbane%20City%20Council.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/submissions/091\\_Sunshine%20Coast%20Council%20submission.pdf](https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/submissions/091_Sunshine%20Coast%20Council%20submission.pdf)

Cycling injury rates in the NT do not differ from injury rates in other states and territories without this exemption.<sup>3</sup>

Lord Mayor Quirk penned the following article in Bmag (23 August 2013) to explain the proposed trial.

The screenshot shows a Bmag article titled "Time for the helmet debate" by Lord Mayor Graham Quirk. The article discusses the debate about mandatory bicycle helmets and the author's perspective. The text is as follows:

**Should wearing a bicycle helmet be mandatory?** It's a question I often get asked and one that I have given a lot of thought to, particularly since my team will have put \$220million into building better bikeways by 2016.

Personally, I believe that helmets should be mandatory for anyone riding their bike on the road and I think you would be hard-pressed to find anyone with a reasonable argument as to why this long-standing rule should be overturned.

However, where I do think people have a valid point is the potential to relax helmet laws in safer off-road situations such as bike paths that run along the river at South Bank or through the city's peaceful parks and reserves.

I understand why compulsory helmet laws were introduced and there's no doubt they were well-intentioned and even suitable for the time. But that was over 20 years ago and there are now many more low-risk, low-speed opportunities for people to enjoy a leisurely bike ride.

As a result of my team's significant investment in bikeways, we've also seen the number of people using Council's bike paths increase 77 per cent since 2004.

I therefore think it's now the right time that these laws were reviewed and voluntary helmet use trialled for safer off-road situations.

That's why I support the State Government's decision to review how bicycles fit into our communities and Council has made a formal submission outlining my position. At the end of the day, I appreciate there are two sides to this argument and in the end Council will comply with whatever final decision is made by the State Government.

However boosting cycling numbers is also important for the health of our city and its residents, as well as helping to alleviate congestion on our roads, and we need to look at anything that will further assist that growth. If that means providing cyclists with a choice as to whether they wish to wear a helmet off road, then it is worthy of consideration.

Cheers,  
*Graham*

Ps. I'd like to wish all the dads out there Happy Father's Day and, as a dad, thank all those family members out there who make our lives so special.

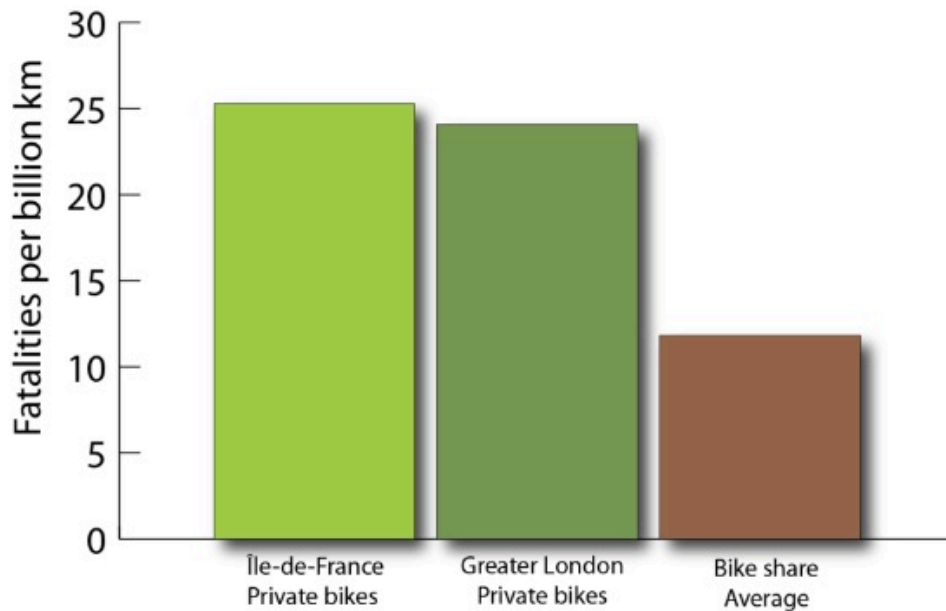
Got a problem in your suburb that needs fixing? Email me at [lordmayor@bmag.com.au](mailto:lordmayor@bmag.com.au).

The parliamentary committee then went on to propose (Recommendation 15) that people riding bikes in Queensland should be exempt from mandatory helmet laws on footpaths, bike paths and roads with a speed limit of 60 km/h or less. This was contained in the report "A New Direction for Cycling In Queensland".<sup>4</sup>

The other exemption the BUG supported was for public and private bike hire usage – for example CityCycle. The committee also supported this (Recommendation 16). Share bikes have an excellent reputation for safety worldwide compared to private bikes as the bikes are heavy, have an upright riding position and usually have no top tube as in Brisbane – that is, they are "step-through" bikes that can be simply stepped off if the rider runs into difficulty. Elliott Fishman illustrated the safety aspects of bike sharing in the following figure based on data from eight cities.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/tp-21Oct2013%20NT%20Cyclist.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/thlgc/2013/inq-cyc/rp-39-29nov13.pdf>



Source: Fishman & Schepers (2014) Global bikeshare: What the data tells us about safety



The Minister did not support the two recommendations of the committee and his response unfortunately contained the endlessly repeated erroneous conflation of *helmet efficacy* on the one hand and *helmet laws* on the other. These are two quite different issues that supporters of the mandatory helmet law and the media often conflate, as in this tweet.



According to the current count at the Bike Sharing World website<sup>5</sup> as of October 2015 there were bike sharing schemes in 948 cities in 61 countries worldwide, with approximately 1,156,360 bike share bicycles in use in these cities.

This includes bike share schemes in five cities in three countries with mandatory helmet laws: Brisbane, Melbourne, Auckland, Christchurch and Seattle.<sup>6</sup> The Nextbike schemes of Auckland

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.bikesharingworld.com/>

(7 stations) and Christchurch (5 stations) are very small in comparison to the others with Brisbane having 150 stations, Melbourne 51 stations, and Seattle 50 stations.

The Vancouver scheme has been delayed many years with the major reason seeming to be issues with the helmet law in the city.<sup>7</sup> In contrast, laws hindering bike share in Mexico City and Tel Aviv were repealed in order to support the schemes there.<sup>8</sup>

The Brisbane scheme began operations in October 2010. According to the latest Brisbane City Council Annual Report of 2014-15, it recorded 307,000 trips in the June 2014 to July 2015 period.<sup>9</sup> With an average of 1,800 bikes available across the 150 stations, this equates to 0.47 trips per bike per day. In comparison, Melbourne achieved approximately 0.86 trips per bike per day in the year 2014. Seattle has averaged about one trip per bike per day.<sup>10</sup> This possibly reflects the cycling commuting modal share of 3.7%<sup>11</sup> being approximately twice that of the 1.9% cycling modal share in the Brisbane Local Government Area.

Brisbane is by far the largest of the three schemes with 1,800 bikes versus Melbourne's 550 bikes and Seattle's 500 bikes. According to Oliver O'Brien, it is the 18<sup>th</sup> largest scheme in the world counting those with live data available.<sup>12</sup> In the current list on Wikipedia, outside China, it is the 21<sup>st</sup> largest by number of bikes or 24<sup>th</sup> largest by number of stations.<sup>13</sup> It has by far the lowest usage rate of any of these cities. Many other cities have steeper topography, hotter and more humid weather, and difficult sign-up procedures, but achieve many times the usage rate of Brisbane's scheme.

Research conducted by the BUG in 2013<sup>14</sup> indicated that usage rates for the top 20 schemes (other than Brisbane) were approximately 4.5 trips per bike per day in the peak three summer months. This is approximately 10 times the Brisbane usage rate, which is fairly stable over the year. Data collection has continued since this time and has indicated that these rates have not changed significantly since then. In fact, the 2011 figures provided for JCDecaux are still a good reflection of usage rates outside Brisbane.<sup>15</sup> The next lowest used scheme is the JCDecaux scheme in Brussels with an estimated 1.2 trips per bike per day, or 1.5 trips per bike per day over the peak three months.

Oliver O'Brien, a researcher from University College London who maintains the "Bike Share Map" with live data on more than 100 schemes worldwide, commented on the Australian schemes at fastcompany.com as follows.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Helmet laws do not appear to apply in the Dubai scheme – e.g.  
<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.10151266311875807.1073741825.121121865806&type=3>

<sup>7</sup> <https://averagejoecyclist.com/vancouver-bike-share/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.cycle-helmets.com/bike-hire-schemes.html>

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150909\\_annual\\_report\\_2014-15\\_full\\_document.pdf](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/20150909_annual_report_2014-15_full_document.pdf) page 58

<sup>10</sup> <http://mynorthwest.com/11/2767010/Who-will-and-who-wont-use-Seattles-bikeshare-program> and <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/transportation/seattle-plans-to-take-over-expand-pronto-bike-sharing-network/>

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.citylab.com/commute/2015/10/bike-commuting-still-on-the-rise/408679/?utm\\_source=SFFB](http://www.citylab.com/commute/2015/10/bike-commuting-still-on-the-rise/408679/?utm_source=SFFB)

<sup>12</sup> <http://oobrien.com/2013/05/the-top-world-bikeshare-cities/>

<sup>13</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_bicycle-sharing\\_systems](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_bicycle-sharing_systems)

<sup>14</sup> [https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/submissions/090\\_Brisbane%20CBD%20BUG%20submission.pdf](https://www.parliament.qld.gov.au/documents/committees/THLGC/2013/INQ-CYC/submissions/090_Brisbane%20CBD%20BUG%20submission.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.cycle-helmets.com/jcdecaux-bike-share.html>

<sup>16</sup> [www.fastcompany.com/3016869/what-real-time-data-tells-us-about-the-future-of-bike-sharing-around-the-world?partner=newsletter](http://www.fastcompany.com/3016869/what-real-time-data-tells-us-about-the-future-of-bike-sharing-around-the-world?partner=newsletter)

### **HELMET REQUIREMENTS KILL BIKE SHARING**

Australian projects, like those in Melbourne and Brisbane, require riders to wear helmets. That's been a turn-off. "Despite having the same technology as New York and London, those systems have been really quiet unfortunately, because they fine people for not wearing helmets." Bikes there have been used less than once a day, on average, compared to an international norm of up to eight trips a day. The cities are now giving away free helmets, and Brisbane is considering relaxing the rules in some areas.

In a 2013 paper on mining bicycle sharing data, O'Brien et al commented "[Australia's systems] are relatively unpopular in this study due to local bylaws requiring helmet use" and noted that of the 38 cities examined in the paper, Brisbane had the lowest rate of concurrent bike usage with at most 4.8% of bikes in use at any given time. In contrast, Chicago, New York, Taipei and Rio de Janeiro had concurrent usage figures in the vicinity of 90%.

Finally, bike sharing schemes have been shown to have a net public health benefit in all research conducted so far (for example Rojas-Rueda 2013 "Health impact assessment of increasing public transport and cycling use in Barcelona" and Woodcock 2014 "Health effects of the London bicycle sharing system"). Neither of schemes has mandatory helmet laws.

With Australia's high obesity and inactivity rates one logical way to increase uptake for cycling is for some of these helmet law exemptions to be tested. In Queensland this will mean the state government taking notice of requests from the public, councils and user groups such as the CBD BUG.

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