



Brisbane Central Business District Bicycle User Group

CBD BUG

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The Right Hon The Lord Mayor of Brisbane
Councillor Graham Quirk
GPO Box 2287
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Dear Lord Mayor

This letter seeks your removal of the restrictions on CityCycle's operating hours that mean stations close nightly from 10 pm to 5 am.

The background to this call for change is the CBD BUG is a strong supporter of Brisbane's CityCycle public bike hire scheme. However, the scheme's nightly closure is viewed as a highly restrictive and unnecessary anomaly among the large scale bike sharing schemes across the world. It is clear CityCycle needs to operate on a 24/7 basis. This would increase its usage by making it a more convenient scheme for existing and potential patrons.

In the CBD BUG's submission to the Queensland Parliament's current Inquiry into Cycling Issues, we reviewed CityCycle's usage rates compared to other world cities and recommended an exemption for the scheme from the mandatory helmet law, 24/7 access and lower speed limits in the CBD. In summary, we recommended that Brisbane learn from and adopt the approaches applied by the most successful public bike sharing schemes such those of Taipei, Barcelona and other world cities.

On 30 November 2012, Transport and Main Roads Minister Scott Emerson announced that go card holders would be able to link to a CityCycle account. This link is available for subscriptions of three months and longer. Councillor Peter Matic, the Brisbane City Council Public and Active Transport Chairman said at the time that "having the go card linked with CityCycle will help encourage people to use public or active transport and reduce congestion on our roads."

We commend the linking of go card to the scheme from this time. However, we note that despite this, there has been no year-on-year increase in usage rates and these remain at levels less than one-tenth of CityCycle's international peers. The only interventions that significantly increased usage rates were the provision of free helmets and price reductions.

If CityCycle continues with such low usage rates it provides ammunition for those who argue that cyclists do not use the infrastructure provided for them, and thus there is no point in further investment in cycling facilities of any kind. However, conversely, if usage rates improved, this is highly likely to result in commuter cycling becoming normalised and more widely accepted.

The CBD BUG notes the following reasons have been given for CityCycle's restricted operating hours.

1. "The existing CityCycle operating hours have been established with the safety of riders and the CityCycle technical team in mind to ensure they can safely access the stations for bicycle distribution and undertake maintenance."
(CityCycle Facebook page, March 2012)
2. "The reasoning behind the 5am – 10pm operating hours include low demand outside of this time and concerns about public safety, noise and service issues in residential areas at night."
(CityCycle Facebook page, April 2013)
3. "...we do lock the system from 10 pm and through to 5 am to try to reduce or stop that risk of people drink-riding because it still is an offence."
(Robert Bitossi, BCC Contract Delivery Manager, comment to Tasmanian parliament committee, November 2012)
4. "So it's about being considerate to residents after 10 o'clock at night but also being considerate to those businesses that operate after that hour. ... It's not so much a question of the noise, just of the people being there and perhaps speaking and perhaps making some noise in respect of their activities. ... there's only about 2% of all trips are made between 9 and 10 pm right now."
(Councillor Peter Matic, comment on 612 ABC, May 2013)
5. "It may be the transfer of bikes that's being referred to there from point A to point B so JCDecaux undertake a transfer of bikes as bikes move around the various stations. ... the only noise factor I can think of is the transfer of bikes from one station to the other after 10."
(Lord Mayor Graham Quirk, comment on 612 ABC, May 2013)

The CBD BUG does not find these reasons valid or compelling. CityCycle maintenance and distribution occur only during daylight hours. The service call centre already opens and closes hours after and before the present 5 am to 10 pm access period. In terms of safety, CityCycle bikes are highly visible due to their fit-out including front and rear lights (which are notable among the cycling community for their brightness), reflectors, reflective tyres and a yellow rear mud guard. The potential for an individual riding while intoxicated could be reduced simply by only allowing long term members 24/7 access, as in Melbourne's scheme.

Concerns about noise are overstated, as stations are located in areas where ambient noise levels from passing motor vehicles and other noise sources would likely already exceed the very limited noise arising from CityCycle station activity.

The CityCycle scheme's highly restricted hours are a unique among international bike sharing schemes. Schemes of its size generally have no restrictions on when bikes can be hired.

Of the 21 largest bike sharing schemes in the world, all allow 24/7 hiring except Brisbane and Barcelona. Barcelona hires are not available from 2 am-5 am Monday to Thursday and 3 am-5 am on Friday.

Among the 27 existing JCDecaux "CycloCity" schemes, 22 are 24/7 schemes. The other four that are not 24/7 are much smaller than Brisbane's 150 station scheme (Amiens, Cergy-Pontoise, Rouen, and Dublin with 26, 40, 21, and 44 stations respectively). These four are closed for between 3 and 4.5 hours per day, with Dublin being the most restrictive from 12.30 am to 5 am. The eleven schemes with more than 44 stations are all 24/7 schemes, except for Brisbane.

Short term (daily or weekly) subscribers to the Melbourne Bike Share scheme cannot hire bikes between midnight and 6 am; while annual subscribers have 24/7 access.

It is also noted that that all CityCycle bike redistribution and maintenance is done outside the hours of 10 pm to 5 am.

Demand rates in other schemes worldwide indicate there is significant demand during between these hours. For example, JCDecaux usage data indicates that for their seven 24/7 schemes with 100 or more stations, during the months of June to August 2013 more than 15% of weekend trips were taken between the hours of 10 pm and 5 am. In Seville, approximately 30% of weekend trips were taken during these hours. Journey data from Washington, Boston, and London show that in these cities approximately 7-8% of all journeys are made between the hours of 10 pm to 5 am, with higher rates at weekends.

In any case, as far as the CBD BUG is aware the demand in Brisbane for CityCycle bikes during the closure hours has not been measured. The low usage rate between 9 and 10 pm cited by Councillor Matic is patently the result of the scheme closing at 10 pm.

It should be noted that the stations in other cities are also located in residential and commercial areas outside the CBD, and that is precisely what makes them useful for trips outside business hours. According to urban transport advisor Peter Midgley, "bike sharing has experienced the fastest growth of any mode of transport in the history of the planet".

There are now more than 620 schemes operational in cities worldwide. Many of these cities have urban densities similar to Brisbane's, and also varying challenges such as topography and weather. Yet the usage rate of Brisbane's scheme is apparently the lowest in the world for any scheme with 100 stations or more.

On the basis that it is clear the current time restriction cannot be justified we call for its removal. This will bring CityCycle into line with the other JCDecaux schemes, and with other schemes in Australia and overseas.

If the Council is serious about active transport, or serious about meeting cycling modal share targets, it needs to encourage CityCycle's take up and use and not impose unwarranted limitations.

I look forward to your response on this matter

Yours faithfully



Paul French
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Brisbane CBD BUG

15 October 2013