



Bicycle Network Mandatory Helmet Review

Opinion of Sundance Bilson-Thompson, PhD (Theoretical Physics), Freestyle Cyclists Inc.

1. *Do you believe it should be mandatory to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle? (If you believe it should be mandatory at some times but not others please describe when.)*

I do not believe it should be mandatory to wear a helmet when riding a bicycle in all circumstances. There may be some circumstances where helmet use is a sensible precaution, and there may be some case for mandating that children wear helmets, but they shouldn't be mandatory for all cyclists of all ages in all circumstances.

2. *What's your reasons for your answer to question one?*

Since the introduction of mandatory helmet laws in Australia there has been no apparent improvement in the safety of cycling, relative to long-term

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improvements in the safety of pedestrians, motorists, motorcyclists, and motor vehicle passengers. Therefore any safety improvements for cyclists can't be regarded as the result of helmet laws and must be ascribed to a general trend to improving transport safety. If helmet laws have had no beneficial effect on public safety, they should not be laws. Numerous studies have found that the health benefits of cycling, with or without a helmet, substantially outweigh the risks - for instance a recent study from the University of Glasgow found that regularly cycling for transport was correlated with a 52% reduction in fatal cases of cardiovascular disease, and a 41% reduction in deaths from all causes. Riding without a helmet can therefore not be regarded as harmful to the individual or detrimental to society, and hence it is unjustifiable to criminalise such an act. Indeed, if relaxation of helmet laws encouraged more people to cycle regularly the net health benefits for society, and savings to government health budgets, would probably be substantial, especially in light of the current obesity epidemic and the rise of lifestyle-related diseases like heart disease and diabetes. The highest rate of cycling in Australia occurs in the Northern Territory, where helmet use is optional for adults on off-road paths, and yet the rate of cycling accidents per journey is no worse than the national average. Overall in Australia the incidence of cycling accidents per journey is extremely low, and hence the situations in which a helmet is useful are extremely rare. The example of countries like the Netherlands shows that infrastructure is far more effective at making cycling safer than protective equipment.

3. *Do you provide consent for your opinion to be made public?*

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Yes

4. *If no, are you happy if we say you provided an opinion but didn't want it made publicly available?*

Yes No

Not applicable

Signed: Sundance Bilson-Thompson

Date: 26/9/2017

Please send completed form to craigr@bicyclenetwork.com.au before 5pm, Friday 13 October, 2017.

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