

Submission – John Perkins

Strong Support

I strongly support a change to the Victorian Road Safety Rules that would require:

- Drivers to leave a minimum distance of one metre when overtaking bicycles riders at speeds up to 60 km/h;
- Leave a minimum distance of 1.5 metres when overtaking bicycle riders at speeds above 60 km/h;
- And also, permit drivers to cross an unbroken centre line in order to pass a bicycle rider **when safe to do so**.

Reasons for support

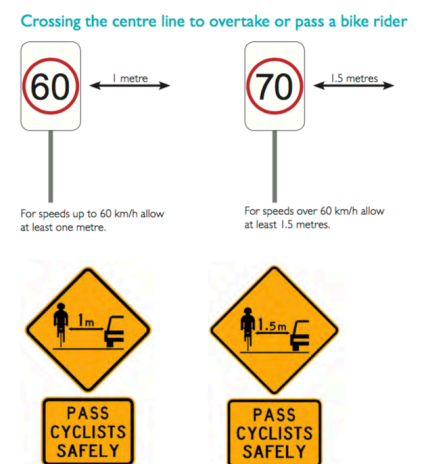
1. The main reason is to increase the safety of cycle riders on public roads. Most drivers do drive safely but, inevitably, there remains a significant number who will attempt to squeeze past bikes (or deliberately blast past). Accidents occur through direct contact or, frequently, an unsettled rider involuntarily jerking left and colliding with the kerb, road furniture or leave the road altogether.
2. The current rule (2009 – Reg 144) provides a vague and inadequate definition of a safe passing distance. It states, “A driver overtaking a vehicle . . . must pass the vehicle at a sufficient distance to **avoid a collision** with the vehicle or obstructing the path of the vehicle;”... The overtaking driver is required to avoid a collision: the driver need only miss a the bicycle by one millimeter to meet the Rule. There has been no collision but, obviously, it is a completely unsafe practice affecting highly vulnerable road users.
3. Requiring a specified minimum distance introduces an objective measure that will gradually become accepted as normal driving behaviour, to the benefit of many.

Education

Introducing the **metre matters** principle is a great opportunity for educating new and current drivers on safer road behaviour. Putting it into the Road Safety Handbook means all Learner drivers will be exposed to the principle at the stage when they are most keen to absorb the rights and responsibilities of road use.

Roads throughout Victoria can also be easily, and cheaply, covered by explanatory signage that reinforces the rule. I was recently in Tasmania and their new yellow road signs (right) could be seen everywhere. Drivers automatically read road signs (even if they later ignore them) and repetition drives the message home.

Plus all the opportunities for TV and radio advertising, social media and more. Publicity for the 2015 introduction of lane filtering in Victoria is an example of how quickly these changes can be picked up by road users through many media platforms.



Personal experience

Like many people I first started riding bicycles to get to school using public roads. Now approaching 70 years I still enjoy riding 150-200 km/week, mainly on public roads. I also pilot a tandem for a regular trip with a blind rider. The increased responsibility of these latter trips makes me very aware of the few centimeters that differentiate feeling safe from feeling very frightened (and angry).

Many drivers simply don't consider bikes to be "vehicles" and, thus, entitled to adequate space on the road. Cars, trucks and buses have precedence; bikes are meant to inhabit the verges, always providing enough space to be passed.

But many roads are narrow and don't have bike lanes. Road verges are usually narrow with broken irregular surfaces that are likely to be scattered with glass, gravel and other debris, plus steep shoulders abutting the road to the right and falling away to kerbs and gutters on the left. Gravel roads are fun but often have unstable surfaces and steep cambers – not much room for maneuver. I would love to ride on broad, generous clean verges but, most frequently, it's simply not possible. We have to ride on the main road pavement with all the traffic, which continually grows in numbers, size and speed.

Thus far I have been lucky but every ride now I expect to have at least one close brush with a speeding vehicle missing me by a very small margin. It is really frightening. I dread the day when a collision may occur. Implementing the **metre matters** principle would do much to make all road users think about living comfortably with one another.

Thanks for mounting this enquiry. I look forward to a new set of safe overtaking rules being introduced as quickly as possible.

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