

# Inquiry into the Road Safety Road Rules 2009 (Overtaking Bicycles) Bill 2015

## Submission from

Don Macrae,  
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I first rode a bicycle in 1950, aged six.

Last year I rode over 10,000 kms of recreational cycling.

In between my cycling has included commuting between Warrandyte and the CBD, between Warrandyte and La Trobe University and riding on holidays in Europe.

I got my driver's licence in 1961, aged 18, and currently drive 15,000 kms annually.

## In Brief

I understand that "The Victorian Government is committed to delivering cycling projects and programs that focus on safety and increased participation in cycling across Victoria."

Based on my personal experience and that of my cyclist friends I believe that the most dangerous aspect of riding a bicycle on Victoria's roads is being overtaken by motor vehicles. Every ride is likely to include a frightening or at least a disconcerting incident, and of course too often vulnerable cyclists are injured or killed. Perhaps more significantly many more are deterred from taking up cycling.

I firmly believe that an overtaking clearance rule would make a very significant contribution to making cycling on public roads a safer and more attractive transport and leisure option.

## Argument

**While dedicated cycling lanes** have an important place in some areas most cycling in Victoria is and always will take place on public roads where cyclists must share the road with motor vehicles. For the cyclist, sharing the road with a motor vehicle is inherently and obviously dangerous. For cyclists the need to share the road is clear. In practice this means that the cyclist is often riding on the extreme left of the road to maximize the opportunity for cars to pass unimpeded. Very few cyclists will exercise their legal right to occupy an entire lane, whether by riding two abreast or by riding away from the left hand edge, because it is clear that this kind of behaviour would be inconsiderate, impractical, confrontational and dangerous for them.

**For drivers of motor vehicles the situation is different.** Most of their attention and skill on the road is directed at other motor vehicles because they are the major determinant of their rate of travel and because they are dangerous. On the other hand cyclists, when they are encountered, do not command the same respect because they are clearly not a physical threat. So unless a driver appreciates the situation of the cyclist, his or her vulnerability and his or her right to safely occupy the road, he or she will be a danger to cyclists. Drivers who are not also cyclists tend to see cyclists as unwonted interruptions to their progress, to be negotiated with as little delay as possible. The result is that without actual ill intent they will tend to pass too close to cyclists, either because impatience

causes them to attempt a pass when there is no safe passing opportunity, or because of a lack of appreciation of cyclist behaviour or because of simple misjudgement.

**The consequences of this situation** all too often are cyclist injury or death, and often, for most cyclists on most cycling trips, a frightening experience. Many people are deterred from taking up cycling because of their perception of the risks involved in riding on public roads.

**At present, a driver can brush by a cyclist** without breaking the law. And if their vehicle does make contact they can swear that they thought there was room – as was the case with Richard Pollett, killed by a truck in Brisbane in 2011 – before Queensland introduced its passing clearance rule. Such a plea would not have been plausible if a passing clearance rule had been in place at the time. Drivers need guidance on how to share the road with cyclists

**Australia can and should learn from countries with a more mature road culture than ours**, where road sharing between motor vehicles and bicycles is accepted. The experience of cycling on Italian roads, for example, is so very different because of the respect accorded to cyclists – whether one is riding through central Florence or rural Tuscan countryside. You don't get buzzed or abused or monstered by big trucks, ever – in my personal experience over several weeks.

**A minimum passing distance is a well-established and well-publicized feature** of the road rules in most European countries. And while a passing clearance rule will not be a silver bullet, you'd think we would need a good reason not to embrace one. If we are serious about encouraging cycling we should be open to all measures which will help us to achieve our objective.

**It is difficult to see any significant objection** to a passing clearance rule. Drivers never want their progress impeded but of course it always is, but most significantly by other motor vehicles. And where it is impeded by a cyclist it is usually only briefly, and what happens next is that the motor vehicle accelerates to the rear of the car or truck or bus next in the queue on the road – so no time is actually lost in the journey. And of course where bicycles have replaced motor vehicles the effect on driving times generally is undoubtedly to reduce them.



Don Macrae

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