

Overview and Outcomes of Victoria's Passing Distance Cycling Safety Public Education Campaign

Allison McIntyre^a, James Sinclair^b, Jodi Page-Smith^c, Paulette Ziekemijer^c and Nina Ellis^c

^aAllison McIntyre Consulting, ^bPassBox, ^cTransport Accident Commission

Abstract

Research shows close passing is associated with the level of safety and discomfort felt by cyclists. A TAC public education campaign aimed to address safe passing distance and encourage more respect for cyclists. The TAC's campaign was seen and well understood by the market. Surveys collected data on mutual respect and the endorsement of recommended passing distances. Passbox conducted a naturalistic study of passing distance in Melbourne pre- and post-campaign. Some small but significant changes in the desired direction were observed. Results also showed that infrastructure has an important role to play and the benefits of bicycle lanes.

Background

The 2016 findings from a Victorian parliamentary inquiry recommended the development of a public education campaign around the distance motorists should leave when passing cyclists. Research from New Zealand shows that close passing is associated with discomfort while cycling and the level of safety felt by cyclists (Balanovic et al., 2016). Every cyclist deserves to be safe and feel safe when using the roads. This paper provides an overview of the TAC campaign and some outcomes.

The Campaign

The TAC developed a public education campaign (illustrated in Figure 1) to address passing distance and encourage more empathy towards cyclists. The main campaign components were aired in November 2017 and March 2018. The message was that drivers should allow cyclists at least one metre's space in speed zones up to 60km/h and 1.5 metre's space in higher speed zones.

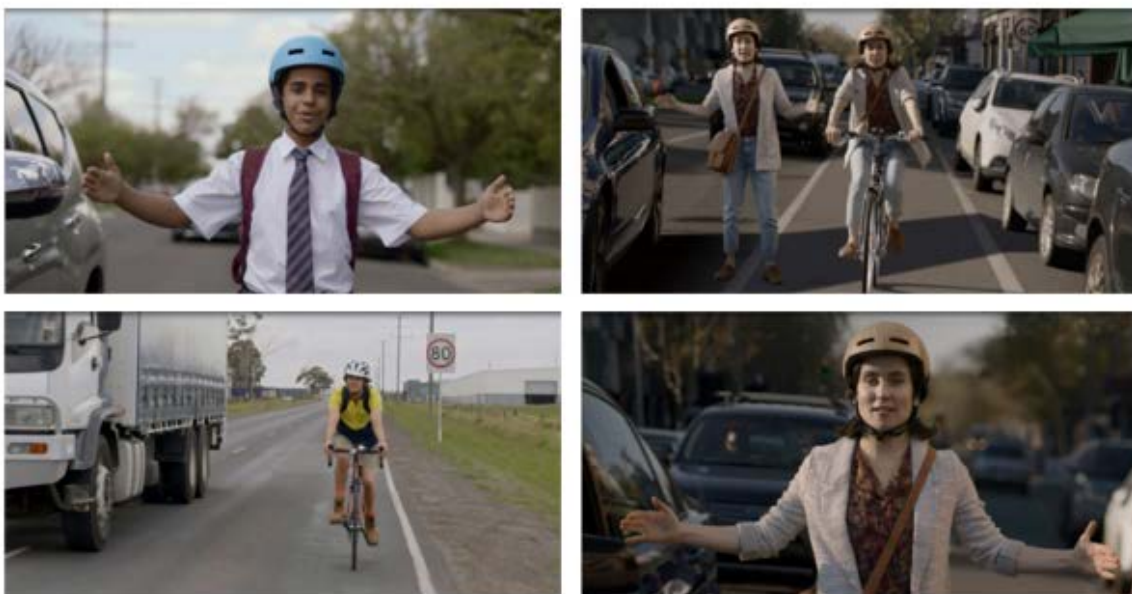


Figure 1. The campaign illustration of the desired passing distance drivers should give cyclists

Method

Data were collected via three research components:

1. Post campaign surveys measuring the recall and understanding of the advertising.
2. Surveys before and after the campaign which included measures of:
 - endorsement of the recommended 1m and 1.5m passing distance,
 - ease of judging a metre when passing cyclists,
 - mutual respect among cyclists and drivers.
3. The Passbox naturalistic study of passing distance. Data were collected in Melbourne during November 2016-March 2017 (pre) and January - March 2018 (post). A Passbox device (video, sonar, GPS) was fitted to bicycles of participants; 18 participated in both waves of the study. Data from about 20,000 passing events was collected and included:
 - Passing distance to the cyclists' left and right
 - Number and width of vehicle lanes
 - Bicycle lane presence and type
 - Passing vehicle type
 - Parking bays and parked vehicles

Results

A range of results from the above data sources will be explored. Some key survey results included:

- Recall of the advertising was higher than TAC norms
- 90% who saw the advertising understood the intended message
- Endorsement of 1m passing distance
- Small but significant improvements in mutual understanding and ease of judging a metre when passing a cyclist

Table 1. Responses to passing distance and mutual respect questions pre and post campaign

	Pre (Oct 2017) n=614	Post (Nov 2017) n=745	Post (Mar 2018) n=336
Drivers should leave at least a metre safety space for cyclists on 60km/h roads - % agree/strongly agree	85%	87%	85%
Drivers should leave at least a 1.5 metre safety space on roads with speeds >60km/h - % agree/strongly agree	75%	78%	75%
It is easy for you to judge how far a metre is when overtaking a cyclist - % disagree	34%	29%*	27%*
Most drivers don't understand what it is like to be a cyclist on the road - % agree/strongly agree	76%	73%	69%*
Most cyclists and drivers show each other courtesy on the roads - % disagree/strongly disagree	47%	43%*	42%*

* significant difference compared to Oct 2017

Some key Passbox results:

- 13,000 passing events from the cyclists and locations present in both waves of the study.
- Regression modelling (comparing like with like) showed a significantly lower (1.99%) rate of close passing post-campaign.

- Regression modelling on all passing events showed that two or more lanes, narrow road width and presence of parking were associated with highest rate of close passing; bicycle lanes were associated with lowest rate.

Conclusions

The TAC's campaign implementation was effective; it was seen and understood by the market. Some of the results from surveys and Passbox indicated small but significant changes in the desired direction. It will be important to monitor if these positive beginnings can be sustained. The Passbox study shows that infrastructure characteristics have a clear role to play in passing distance. Comparisons to literature and methodological issues will be discussed.

References

Balanovic, J., Davison, A., Thomas, J., Bowie, C., Frith, B., Lusby, M., Kean, R., Schmitt, L., Beetham, J., Robertson, C., Trotter, M., Kortegast, P. & Burton, J. (2016). Investigating the feasibility of trialling a Minimum Overtaking Gap law for motorists overtaking cyclists in New Zealand. NZ Transport Agency Internal Report.

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