

Cycle-Aware: Preparing novice drivers to interact safely with cyclists

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Abstract

Improving infrastructure and educating drivers and cyclists are two responses to cyclist safety. This paper reports on stage one of *Cycle-Aware*, a three year study targeting novice driver education and training. The content analysis of education and training materials revealed limited and inconsistent advice on interacting with cyclists who are represented in neutral or negative terms while drivers are represented in positive terms. Many stakeholders interviewed were unsure of what advice to offer novice drivers beyond 'sharing the road'. Some recommended education on cyclist vulnerability, the rationale for cyclist-related road rules, contextualizing cyclist behaviours, and specific guidance on common interactions.

Background

Concerns about safety present a major barrier to cycling for transport. Improving infrastructure is one response while educating drivers and cyclists is another. *Cycle-Aware* is a three year project targeting novice driver education and training. This paper reports on stage one which gathered information about current and possible future novice driver education and training. Stage two will compare cyclist crashes involving novice and experienced drivers. The final stage involves developing and testing a cyclist-related module for novice drivers.

Method

Qualitative content analysis was used to interrogate government novice driver education and training materials. It examined the extent and nature of cyclist-related advice and contrasted the representation of drivers and cyclists. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from departments of transport and/or road safety, motoring and cycling organizations, third party insurers and driver training associations.

Results

Analysis of driver education and training materials found that references to cycling or cyclists was limited. Advice given to novice drivers was inconsistent within jurisdictions and often inconsistent or contradictory across jurisdictions. For example, in New South Wales drivers are advised to sound their car horns to alert cyclists of their presence while in Queensland drivers are advised not to sound their horn because it may startle cyclists and cause them to fall. Jurisdictions vary on explaining cyclist behaviour and providing rationales for laws like minimum passing distances or filtering. Further, cyclists were represented almost exclusively in neutral or negative terms. Negative references included identifying cyclists as unpredictable, untrained, a danger, and a 'hazard'. Drivers were much more likely to be represented in positive terms.

Many stakeholders reported tensions between motorists and cyclists were caused by a lack of knowledge or compliance with the road rules by both drivers and cyclists. Importantly, motor vehicle registration was considered a key issue as some motorists believed cyclists did not have a right to use the roads because they did not pay registration. Many stakeholders were unsure of what advice to include in novice driver education and training beyond 'sharing the road'. Motoring and cycling organizations provided the most extensive and detailed recommendations on cyclist-related driver education and training. This advice included education on the vulnerability of cyclists, explaining the rationale for cyclist-related road rules, and contextualizing cyclist behaviours. They

also recommended specific advice on common interactions such as overtaking, opening car doors, scanning appropriate areas of the road.

Conclusion

Lack of appropriate and consistent advice may undermine a driver's ability to interact safely with cyclists. Negative stereotypes of cyclists at the outset of a person's driving career may create or exacerbate on-road tensions between cyclists and drivers. Government authorized driver education and training materials lend the authority of government to the views in those materials.

Consequently, the absence of cyclist-related advice and negative stereotypes support drivers who hold the view that cyclists are not important road users or that they are a problem on the road. It is important to ensure that novice driver education and training materials include consistent and neutral (or positive) advice on interacting with cyclists.