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c/o: Infrastructure Victoria Submission link
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Victoria's Draft 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy

Victorian Motorcycle Council Submission
February 2021

About this submission:

The Victorian Motorcycle Council welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to Infrastructure Victoria for Victoria's draft 30 year Infrastructure Plan. The submission is narrowly focussed on the transport aspects of the plan.

The Victorian Motorcycle Council (VMC) was created to represent the interests of all motorcyclists, motorcycling organisations and relevant stakeholders in Victoria. The Victorian Motorcycle Council is represented on the Australian Motorcycle Council, the peak motorcycle body in Australia.

This submission has been formulated from the point of view of motorcycling and takes into account the extensive knowledge and thinking of a diverse group of experienced, representative, passionate and engaged motorcyclists, addressing an apparent blind spot in the draft strategy and those that prepared it. This submission distils some of the more relevant aspects of those considerations and is made in good faith that the finalised strategy will address the identified shortcomings.

The information included in this submission is for all intents and purposes, factual, correct, accurate and relevant. The VMC, and/or its associates, are available to expand on any of the points contained within this submission, or available to consult further on related matters not covered in this submission.

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Introduction

This is a narrowly focussed submission by design.

It identifies the conspicuous absence of a legitimate and separate legal mode of transport that dovetails seamlessly into the primary transport and congestion improvement objectives of the strategy. It also identifies an apparent bias in the draft strategy in the area of transport and mobility.

The missing mode of transport is powered two/three wheelers (PTWs), commonly referred to as *motorcycles*¹. They are a ready to go now, congestion reducing² solution that arguably brings a slew of practical and convenience benefits above and beyond walking, cycling and public transport. In addition, motorcycles are recognised as having high fuel economy, causing little to no wear and tear to public roads, experience generally shorter transit times due to filtering and require less parking space. Each one of these benefits helps address the important transport issues raised by the draft strategy.

Motorcycles are also recognised as being a covid-safe mode of transport, which is believed to be one of the reasons behind a recent boost in PTW sales and that is likely to see PTWs remain as a growing part of the covid-normal transport landscape.

The draft strategy completely fails to mention motorcycles and only mentions the word “scooter” in terms of personal mobility. This demonstrates at best a blind spot or at worst, a clear bias in the strategy. In light of the role PTWs were outlined to play in the 2012 “State of Australian Cities” report³, failure to recognise PTWs and their potential benefits is a major miss, as is the failure to recognise and account for the likely sustained increase in PTW use.

The Victorian Motorcycle Council recommends that Infrastructure Victoria immediately reviews the draft strategy. The infrastructure plan needs to include strategies and recommendations that promote and/or factor in the greater uptake of motorcycle use, a road user mode that helps address many of the transport concerns raised. Further, the strategy's clear emphasis (bias) on reshaping the road system towards walking and cycling, will likely result in a decrease in motorcycle safety - this concern must be addressed.

One strongly practical way to both promote PTWs and allow for them in current and future traffic mix, is to a) recognise and balance their needs in future road layout changes, and b) exempt motorcycles from any and all forms of congestion pricing, levies and charges given that PTWs inherently address the issues targeted by these user pays pricing mechanisms.

¹ In the context of this submission, “motorcycles”/PTWs includes all popularly thought of forms and variants of “motor bikes” and “scooters”, typically compliant with Australian Design Rules classes LC, LM and LE, requiring a license to be driven on public roads.

² <https://www.tmlleuven.be/en/project/motorcyclesandcommuting> - A 10% shift to PTWs produces a 40% reduction in congestion.

³ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure/pab/soac/2012.aspx>

Where Are Motorcycles in Victoria's Infrastructure Plan?

The draft strategy completely fails to mention and account for motorcycles – a legitimate mode of transport. It mentions “transport” over 700 times, “public transport” over 200 times, “cycling” related mentions over 200 times and “walking” and related mentions over 100 times. These mentions are made both in terms of related concerns to be addressed and solutions they may represent, but the third vulnerable road user is never accounted for or considered in the strategy. It is conspicuous by its absence.

The draft strategy totally fails to recognise that PTWs are particularly suited to help address many of the transport and urban mobility concerns raised and therefore fails to account for and address their future infrastructure needs. PTWs have been the fastest growing road user sector for much of the last 15 years⁴, so the fact that they've been overlooked is somewhat surprising and disappointing.

The draft strategy fails to recognise Powered Two/Three Wheelers.

Motorcycles Are a Solution

In 2012, the “State of Australian Cities”⁵ report specifically recognised the role PTWs could play in maintaining amenity in growing cities. It is disappointing that this report failed to get its due recognition in the draft infrastructure plan.

This apparent PTW blind spot in the draft strategy is not an isolated event - the VMC has noted similar disappointing oversights in both local and national authorities at various times. It is also a phenomenon in international jurisdictions as can be noted in the following article speaking to the significant practical benefits and transport solutions provided by PTWs:

"First: walking and cycling are good for short distances. The average citizen will not walk or cycle for more than half an hour. This means about two kilometres walking or seven kilometres cycling in an urban environment, with not too many traffic lights or busy crossings."

Looking for Urban Mobility Solutions? Try Motorcycles!

<http://www.fema-online.eu/website/index.php/2020/02/26/try-motorcycles/>

The draft strategy points out that over half of Melbourne's car trips are less than 6km in length. This is not a surprising statistic given that people's day to day living and needs are exercised locally. Some of this traffic may be able to be re-directed to walking and cycling, especially for those that are time rich and physically capable, but they are not practical

⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/tourism-and-transport/motor-vehicle-census-australia>

⁵ <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/infrastructure/pab/soac/2012.aspx>

transport modes for the local weekly grocery shop, or to pick up the family's evening take-away⁶, or to string together multiple errands at different points within the local area.

Above this distance, it goes without saying that PTWs come into their own and with greater use can displace a significant number of solo occupant single purpose car trips. It is clear that PTWs are a ready to go now solution to help relieve road system congestion.

The draft strategy argues that personal mobility devices would be suited to play a greater role in this circumstance, once again completely missing the practical role that could be played by PTWs.

Motorcycles/PTWs have greater short trip utility than walking and cycling. They are a ready to go solution for greater urban mobility and dealing with congestion.

Rider Numbers Are Growing.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics "Motor Vehicle Census" report⁷ shows that for the better part of the last 15 years, PTWs have been the fastest growing road user sector. People are voting with their wallets in the face of urban sprawl and road congestion.

As Victorians navigate what a covid-normal life looks like, it has been reported that traffic volumes have returned to pre-covid levels despite many still working from home. It has also been reported that public transport patronage is down with many indicating they'd prefer covid safe alternatives. This is believed to be behind an increase in local PTW sales⁸. Anecdotal reports also indicate that dealers are experiencing particularly strong year to date scooter sales, exceeding figures from previous years.

People are already making their own mobility decisions which are likely to fix increased numbers of PTWs on Victoria's roads. The draft infrastructure strategy needs to recognise this reality and encourage it as every PTW on the road is one less car, freeing up something in the order of 10-15m² of road space, alleviating congestion, reducing pollution, reducing road system wear and tear, saving on car park space provision, and maximising current road stock/infrastructure for extended lengths of time. In addition to factoring PTWs into its road transport recommendations, one practical way for Infrastructure Victoria to promote the use of PTWs is to ensure that PTWs are exempted from any congestion pricing, levies or charges.

Motorcycle/PTW numbers are growing and should be welcomed as a ready to go solution, supported by exemptions from congestion levies.

⁶ A 6km trip, cycled at an average "don't want to get sweaty" speed of about 12-14km/h would turn a local trip for fish and chips into an hour return trip, most likely needing to reheat the food once completed.

⁷ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/tourism-and-transport/motor-vehicle-census-australia>

⁸ <https://www.fcai.com.au/news/index/view/news/696>

Motorcycling Is Perceived As Dangerous

The popular perception is that motorcycling is dangerous. This perception is fuelled by the media, by lasting impressions from a bygone era when motorcycles and rider skills were more basic, reinforced by confirmation bias as another rider attracts judgement for some observed riding behaviour, all underpinned by the rider's increased injury risk in a crash or fall. It is reinforced by PTWs being "difficult to see"⁹ and by transport policy being focussed on PTW predominantly as a road safety issue. There may be a reluctance to encourage PTW use as a result.

Being a vulnerable road user, this injury risk is a given, however the same perception does not persist for pedestrians and cyclists despite similar vulnerabilities and injury risks. Instead, regulations and transport policy produce designs and engineering treatments addressing pedestrian and cyclist safety without a second thought. It is arguable that the proliferation of such treatments has potentially elevated PTWs to being the most vulnerable road user. The draft strategy's focus on similar treatments will likely entrench this imbalance even further.

That said, motorcycle safety is an incredibly complex issue, defying simplistic intuitive notions – as evidenced by the Victorian Parliamentary Inquiry into Motorcycle Safety¹⁰. Research has shown that if a road system is made safer for PTWs, it is safer for all road users. Victoria's future transport infrastructure planning is ideally placed to capitalise on that reality. Infrastructure Victoria should not shy away from recognising and encouraging the use of PTWs (and the role they can play) on the grounds of "safety". If nothing else, an inclusive framework encouraging and accepting PTWs will lead to natural safety outcomes through a concept called the "prevalence effect".¹¹

The perception that motorcycling is dangerous persists despite the fatality toll reducing significantly (see Figure 1). It persists despite both the fatality *rate* dropping to less than a third of what it was and the serious injury *rate* more than halving since records began (circa 1987). This perception persists despite past data suggesting that more participants per hour are injured horse riding than motorcycling¹². A shift in transport policy which normalises PTWs as a legitimate and separate transport mode – as has been experienced for walking and cycling – will help address this perception.

Unfortunately, the strategy's strong emphasis on redistributing road space for the creation of more cycling routes will likely lead to motorcycle safety reductions. Giving over road space to create bicycle lanes and/or widening footpaths means cars and bikes will be forced into closer proximity sharing a reduced space, thus compromising rider safety. This is amplified on routes with trams. Shopping strips are increasingly popular areas for such treatments which also contain additional risks due to higher levels of distraction. ***The safety of one road user should not come at the cost of the safety of another road user.***

⁹ A very complex issue almost all to do with driver cognitive and inattentive blindness rather than PTW conspicuity. Refer to <https://scienceofbeingseen.wordpress.com/>

¹⁰ <http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/rsc/inquiries/article/1409>

¹¹ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/24464593/>

¹² <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b79fc4f1-a447-4e6f-ab76-d5257f4b738f/bulletin24.pdf> .pg2

Infrastructure Victoria’s inclusion of PTWs will be an important part of normalising PTWs as part of transport policy. Further, lasting safety improvements can be gained by having better skilled riders on better accommodating roads, shared with more aware road users. Victoria’s infrastructure plan is well placed to address roads/road space use and ideally placed to help with awareness through encouraging greater PTW use.

Motorcycle safety is a complex issue which can in part be addressed by normalising their part in transport policy and their increased use on Victorian roads.

Figure 1: Transport Accident Commission figures, Victorian Annual Motorcycle Rider Fatality Toll 1987 – 2020, showing a continuing reducing trend in the actual toll figures.



Closing Comments / Conclusion

Now is the time to help set up Victoria for improved and increased PTW use, with all its congestion beating, urban mobility improving, reduced wear and tear and environmental improving benefits. The failure of the draft strategy to acknowledge PTWs, let alone account for them in Victoria's future, must be re-dressed as a matter of urgent priority.

Two ways that Infrastructure Victoria can account for and encourage PTW use is to ensure that the needs of PTWs are accounted for in any road space planning and development, and to exempt PTWs from any and all congestion pricing mechanisms.

