



MEDIA RELEASE

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RAW DEAL FOR CANBERRA COMMUTERS

Canberrans working for the Federal and ACT Governments will be dealt another blow if amendments to the Comcare workers compensation scheme go through Federal Parliament. The proposals would remove benefits for injuries sustained on a trip to or from work or at lunch-time.

It would mean that Commonwealth and ACT government staff would receive no payment for loss of wages or medical expenses that they have been entitled to for many years.

"No commuter, whether they walk, catch a bus, drive or ride a bike, will be covered. A motorist who walks from a car park, trips and fractures a wrist will not be covered. Motorists will be on their own if their injuries are not another driver's fault. Nor will a person who comes off a bike and breaks a collar bone on their way to work," said Peter Strang, spokesperson for Pedal Power.

"The changes are being justified as cost savings," Mr Strang said. "But it's nothing more than cost shifting - to Medicare; to employees who'll pay medical expenses and lose pay for time off work; or to the NRMA as the ACT's third party insurer, who will pass it on to motorists."

Another reason given for the change is employers have little control over staff travelling to work, and so cannot manage the risk. "That's also misleading," said Mr Strang. "Does an OH&S officer sit in the back seat to give warnings to someone driving to a work meeting during the day?"

The Bill to make the changes was introduced just before Parliament rose for the Christmas break. It was referred to a Senate Committee which conducted hearings in Melbourne last week. However, it did not invite anyone from Canberra to appear and declined to sit in Canberra, home to most of those affected.

The changes run counter to other government measures to increase physical activity, in the face of growing levels of overweight and obese children and adults. Growing numbers of walkers and riders are building regular exercise into their daily commute. Last October the Federal Government supported National Ride to Work Day and Pedal Power helped 40 ACT workplaces participate on the day.

"These riders enjoy their healthy daily commute, arriving invigorated and ready for work," Mr Strang said. "This brings benefits to employers; and to the government in the form of reduced sick leave and less expenditure on hospitals, doctors and medicines. These benefits are threatened by the proposed changes to Comcare."

Photo opportunity: Greg Berry – 0414 066 820 (for media use only)

For more details: Peter Strang - 0408 181 114 (for media use only)