



Safer pedestrian crossings

The current road rule that prohibits cycling across pedestrian crossings doesn't work in the ACT. Pedal Power ACT believes:

- “Road ahead, Slow to walking pace” should be stencilled on shared paths where they approach non-signalised pedestrian crossings; and that
- the ‘crossing rule’ should be changed to allow people to *cycle at walking pace* (no more than 10 km/h) across pedestrian crossings that do not have cycle lights.

These changes will increase safety and make cycling quicker and more convenient. This will help achieve the ACT Government's Sustainable Transport Plan target of increasing cycling trips as a percentage of work trips from 2.3% in 2001 to 5.0% in 2011 – a 117% increase.

The purpose of the current law and why it fails

- On 1 March 2000, new Australian Road Rules were enacted in the ACT. One of the new rules, Australian Road Rule 248 - the ‘crossing rule’, requires people cycling across marked crossings to dismount and walk across the crossings.
- The crossing rule is meant to stop reckless people cycling quickly across crossings and giving motor vehicles little time to react. However it doesn't work. Drivers are required to, and usually do, give way to any person using a crossing whether they be a cycling, walking or skateboarding. When vehicles have stopped at a crossing, people generally cycle across the crossing, rather than inconvenience the driver and themselves by taking the time to get off their bicycle, walk across and then remount their bicycle. People cycling with cleated shoes are also likely to disobey the crossing rule because walking across the road will damage their cleats.
- When there are no cars around, people simply don't see the point in dismounting, walking across the crossing and then remounting their bicycle.
- There has been very little publicity and enforcement of the crossing rule in the ACT, so many people don't know of its existence.
- Almost all people who cycle (ie, many sensible otherwise, law-abiding people) disobey the crossing rule. An April 2005 survey on the David St, O'Connor bike path crossing counted 1306 people with bicycles using the crossing in one weekday. Only 19 of them (1.5 %) wheeled their bike across the crossing, the remainder rode across it¹. Canberra has very many shared paths compared to the rest of Australia and cycling is allowed on footpaths in the ACT. These factors mean the crossing rule is one of Canberra's least obeyed laws. Its existence makes a mockery of the law.

Why warnings should be stencilled on shared paths and the law should be changed

- Stencilling the words “Road ahead, Slow to walking pace” on shared paths where they approach pedestrian crossings will give people a reminder at *every* pedestrian crossing to act sensibly. The message will last longer, and be much more effective than any publicity campaign.

¹ Datacol Research Pty Ltd (2005) *David St O'Connor ACT: Pedestrian, Bicycle and Vehicle count*

- Stencilling the words “Road ahead, Slow to walking pace” is a big improvement in safety on the current situation where there are no messages to telling people cycling to slow or stop at a crossing.
- Slowing to walking pace and then cycling slowly across crossings is sensible behaviour undertaken by many otherwise law-abiding citizens. Changing the crossing rule will still not stop reckless people cycling ‘hell for leather’ across crossings, but neither does the current law. We can’t ‘legislate against stupidity’ but we can, and should, encourage sensible behaviour.
- Changing the crossing rule as suggested will not require any changes in driver behaviour. Motor vehicles generally give way at crossings regardless of whether the person crossing is walking, cycling or skateboarding.
- Changing the crossing rule will make cycling quicker and easier and help achieve the Sustainable Transport Plan target of increasing cycling trips by 117%. Dismounting at every marked crossing can add minutes to cycling trips. This *discourages*, rather than encourages, cycling.
- Changing the crossing rule will change the current situation which makes a mockery of the law.