

# Travelling by bicycle is faster than you think



Cars appear fast when watching a motor sports race or a television advertisement. They speed down the open highway, without another car in sight. The reality however, as those commuting to work can testify, is quite different. Traffic lights, congestion and parking difficulties can bring the high velocity images from TV to an abrupt halt.

In Melbourne, the average speed of a commuting car is 19.7km/h<sup>1</sup>. A bicyclist can comfortably average 17km/h, with many experienced cyclists traveling above 20km/h.

Traffic lights can slow the cyclist's average speed, but they are able to wait at the front of the queue thereby limiting the delay posed by red lights. As cyclists are able to park directly outside their destination, the door-to-door travel time is very often less than the equivalent trip taken by car, especially for short journeys under 5 kilometres.<sup>2</sup>



It is also important to consider the total time costs associated with different modes of transport. Most car drivers who believe their car is saving them time ignore the huge investment of time needed to earn the money to pay for all the costs associated with the car (including not only fuel costs, but also registration, insurance, depreciation, tolls and parking charges). Examining the total time devoted to each mode of transport enables us to calculate the 'effective speed' of these modes.<sup>3</sup> Effective speed calculations for car drivers in Canberra show that a large

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4WD car could have a speed as low as 12.8km/h, far slower than a bicycle, with an effective speed of 18km/h. The total time devoted to transport by cyclists is mainly concerned with their time travelling, because bicycle-operating costs are negligible. In contrast, some car owners must devote a third of their time at work pay car costs. By switching from cars to bicycles and public transport, not only would we be likely to live longer, healthier and happier lives, but we could also reduce our hours of work or retire earlier – perhaps 15 years earlier.

## But aren't distances in Australia too long to ride a bike?

Though Australia is a large country, the majority of our car trips are surprisingly short. In Melbourne, 38% of car trips are less than 3 kilometres and 53% are below 5 kilometres,<sup>4</sup> with similar figures reported in Sydney and Brisbane.<sup>5</sup> Many of these short car trips could comfortably be completed by bicycle. Indeed, such distances represent an excellent opportunity to get the exercise necessary to protect against the epidemics of obesity and diabetes.<sup>6</sup>

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An added bonus of combining transport and exercise is that you'll save valuable time and money by eliminating the need for gym memberships! In fact, for each hour people spent cycling, there is a gain of more than one hour in healthy life, due to the benefits of physical activity.<sup>7</sup>

## Bikes on public transport – a winning combination!

Combining cycling and public transport is a cost and time effective way of completing trips beyond a comfortable riding distance. Cycling to the train station or bus stop can get you there in a quarter of the time it takes to walk. Many train services allow you to travel with your bike and some stations have special lockers to store bikes. Canberra and Brisbane even have buses that can carry bikes. Combining cycling and public transport provides easy access to almost all areas of the city without the heavy economic, environmental and health costs of car use.



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## What would make cycling trips faster and safer?

- Slower traffic speeds (eg 40kms per hour) and traffic calming: this is the most effective way to increase real and perceived safety for people riding bicycles
- Separating cars and bicycles with bike lanes or dedicated cycling paths that are clearly signposted and marked
- Connecting bicycle lanes with good intersection treatments, including 'bicycle streets' where bikes have right of way
- Seamless connections between cycle ways and public transport
- End of trip facilities (for example, secure bicycle storage, showers and change rooms)
- Extensive driver education to raise motorists' awareness of cyclists' use of the roads and relevant road rules

- Improving cyclists' knowledge, skills and safe cycling behaviour
- Traffic regulations and enforcement that heavily favour pedestrians and cyclists
- Restrictions on motor vehicle use, including limited parking



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## What can you do?

- Ride your bike!
- Ask your bus operator to consider providing bike racks on their buses.
- Measure the time the trip to work or to the shops takes by car (door to door) and how long it takes you to cycle.
- Cycle for short trips to shops, parks, work, visiting friends, or for fun.
- Talk and write to your local council, state and federal governments or authorities asking for better cycling infrastructure or policies
- Join a cycling organisation

References and further information available at:  
[www.cyclingpromotion.com.au](http://www.cyclingpromotion.com.au) or [www.bfa.asn.au](http://www.bfa.asn.au)



<b>Bicycle Federation of Australia</b>	<a href="http://www.bfa.asn.au">www.bfa.asn.au</a>	<b>Bicycle Transportation Alliance</b>	<a href="http://www.multiline.com.au/~bta/">www.multiline.com.au/~bta/</a>
<b>Bicycle NSW</b>	<a href="http://www.bicyclensw.org.au">www.bicyclensw.org.au</a>	<b>Bicycle Victoria</b>	<a href="http://www.bv.com.au">www.bv.com.au</a>
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- <sup>1</sup> Department of Sustainability and Environment, 2006 *Melbourne Atlas*, Victorian Government.
- <sup>2</sup> Austroads, 2005 *The Australian National Cycling Strategy 2005-2010* (draft), Australian Government, Canberra.
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<http://www.greenhouse.gov.au/tdm/publications/pubs/effectivespeeds.pdf>
- <sup>4</sup> Victorian Activity and Travel Survey, 1994 – 1999, RMIT University, Melbourne.
- <sup>5</sup> Austroads, 2005, *The Australian National Cycling Strategy 2005-2010*, Sydney  
<http://www.austroads.com.au/documents/TheAustralianNationalCyclingStrategy2005-2010.pdf>  
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- <sup>6</sup> Davis A (Ed), Racioppi F, Dora C, Krech R, Von Ehrenstein O., 2002 *A Physically Active Life Through Everyday Transport*, World Health Organisation, Regional Office for Europe, Denmark.
- <sup>7</sup> Pucher J., 2006 *The Key to Public and Political Support for Walking and Cycling*, Connecting Cycling Mini Conference, Key Note Address, Department of Infrastructure, Melbourne, February 16th.

References and further information available at:  
[www.cyclingpromotion.com.au](http://www.cyclingpromotion.com.au) or [www.bfa.asn.au](http://www.bfa.asn.au)



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