

# We're being taken for a ride over cycle ways planning

**Paul Nicolaou**



Sydney's cycle ways are fine where they make sense and there has been proper planning and consultation.

However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that planning and consultation have gone missing in action. At the same time, Sydneysiders have been more than reasonable in accepting cycle ways as a part of the traffic landscape.

Their tolerance has been commendable even as traffic lanes disappear and are given over to bike riders.

But there are too many "cooks in the kitchen" when it comes to installing cycle ways — a veritable

conga line of bureaucracies.

There is the State Government along with local councils, businesses and community groups all pursuing their own agendas. It seems there is a prevailing attitude that a cycle way is coming whether you like it or not so you better just like it.

Such a contest of competing views means there is no plan on where cycle ways go, how they are built, who should manage them and how their use should be promoted once constructed. King Street and the trails of the Theatre Royal are a microcosm of what can go wrong when planning, consultation and persuasion go missing.

Point-to-point drivers find it almost impossible to set down and pick up patrons, including the elderly and mobility challenged.

People have been hurt tripping over concrete cycle way dividers. Even the most ardent supporter of

cycle ways would be concerned at this outcome.

We know that Sydneysiders have strong opinions about cycle ways — both for and against with equal levels of passion and noise. So, what is the road out of the current dilemma? A mature conversation about cycle ways would be a good start.

The new State Government should ask the Greater Cities Commission to conduct a comprehensive review into cycle ways in our major cities.

The Commission, in conjunction with local councils, should be charged with delivering an overall plan for cycling.

It would replace a process that is haphazard, lacks proper consultation and is hit-and-miss when it comes to the use of cycle ways in our cities.

Cycle ways have their supporters and they make a compelling case.

Dr Mike Harris at the University of NSW School of Built Environment

says they boost local businesses.

A study from the University of Melbourne also found that bike parking produced more revenue for businesses per hour than car parking.

"The research shows cyclists tend to spend more money locally," Dr Harris said. "They buy things more frequently because they can easily stop and walk into a shop in a heartbeat." For individual commuters, switching from cars to bikes can create savings in motor vehicle costs and parking fees.

Some reports show replacing a car trip with a bike trip saves money for the individual and for society.

Business Sydney is all for cycle ways that help keep Sydney moving, add to its vibrancy and bring more commercial activity to businesses along their routes.

Other cities have more cycle ways but we don't see Sydney as being in competition with cities such as

Melbourne and Canberra in terms of the number of cycleways or the distances covered.

We would much prefer to get the cycle way conundrum right for Sydney. We live and work in a unique city and decisions on road use and sharing should be made in this context rather than as a competition with cities that might be of a different character and layout.

We support good policy and that includes cycle ways where there has been reasonable consultation with communities and businesses.

The government and councils need to do more to win over these constituencies by making a strong case that resonates. Better planning, better consultation and better communication would mean far less angst and more acceptance where they make sense.

**Paul Nicolaou is the executive director of Business Sydney**