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Getting around on a bike

Cycling for transport is on the increase. CHOICE tells you how to find your way around, and keep safe on the roads.

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Cycling is booming in Australia — not just for recreation but for transport. Big efforts by cycling advocates and an increasing number of new riders mean that getting from A to B by bike is becoming safer, more convenient — and more fun!

Riding a bike can help your health, save you money and reduce your greenhouse gas emissions. You don't need heaps of fancy gear, just a helmet, a bike that's serviced regularly, a good lock, bright clothes and lights if you plan to ride after dark.

There's still a way to go, but exciting new facilities around Australia are making cycling for transport easier. In this report we tell you where to go for helpful maps, online route finders and local groups to give you encouragement and advice.

A transport trend

Car-owners devote a lot of time to their cars: about 18 percent of their life can be spent working to pay for the car, its petrol, tolls, plus driving it, parking it and sitting in traffic. About half of car trips in Australian cities are under 5km — a distance easily covered on a bicycle. Build exercise into your transport method, and you've multi-tasked beautifully. You've saved time, saved money on fuel and gym fees and cut your greenhouse gas emissions.

People across Australia are realising these benefits, with the number of bicycles on major commuter routes across Australia rising quite dramatically in recent years, particularly in inner city areas where congestion can mean cycling is faster than car travel.

We're definitely a long way from 'mainly bike', with only 1% of all ride-to-work trips taken by bicycle. But some councils are already anticipating that a switch to cycling will deliver reduced road costs,

reduced overcrowding on public transport, lower greenhouse gas and air pollution emissions, reduced cycling accidents — not to mention healthier citizens.

Still finding excuses not to think outside the car? In this article CHOICE explores some of the exciting new facilities and support that are changing the face of cycling.

Did you know that some Aussies can get roadside assistance for their bikes, (for example through Victoria's RACV)? We also take stock with an essentials checklist for the person who cycles for transport — and a bike contacts list will help you find the best bike route.

Number crunch

- **1.47 million** Number of bikes bought in 2007, outselling cars for the eighth year in a row.
- **1.3 tonnes a year** Amount of greenhouse gases saved by a person converting their 10 km commute from car to bike.
- **22%** Growth in commuter bike trips in Australia between 2001 and 2006 — including a whopping 42% in Melbourne!
- **10%-30%** Increase in number of bikes on major commuter routes across Australia in 2007.
- **8%** Proportion of peak-time (7am-10am) vehicles in Melbourne in 2007 that were bikes — compared to 4% in 2006.
- **90,000** Estimated total number of riders who participated in the 2007 National Ride to Work Day — formal registrations up 186% on the previous year.
- **2 to 3 times** The reduction in exposure to air pollution on a bike, compared to being in a car on the same road.
- **38 fatalities** From road cycling per year in Australia since 2000. This contrasts with 52 per year in 1990s, when road cycling was less popular.

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