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Jim Cox
Minister for Infrastructure
Tasmania Government

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Re: South Arm Road Upgrade and its Impacts on Cycling Infrastructure

Dear Minister

I am writing this open letter to you to express my opposition to the proposal to sever an existing key arterial cycleway to South Arm to allow for a new road intersection as described in the proposed *South Arm Road Upgrade* at <http://www.transport.tas.gov.au/>.

Specifically I am asking you to re-examine all ways that the severing of this off-road footpath and cycle-way can be prevented in order to allow for an intersection between South Arm Road and Oceana Drive. Failing to do that, can you at least consider ways to offset the safety and time burden this places on cyclists such as myself and my partner who use this cycleway several times a week commuting to and from work.

Essentially, it seems incongruent to us that DIER is proposing to sever an existing off-road arterial cycling route to the South Arm area at a time when:

- the State Government is espousing the need for Tasmania's to get fitter and healthier to take the burden off our health system;
- petrol prices are rising and it appears that more and more commuters are transferring from cars and out onto their bikes;
- the political landscape around the world has suddenly woken up to the need to do something about reducing our carbon emissions, including reducing vehicle emissions;
- there is evidence that one of the highest risk accident zones for cyclists is where they move from a footpath or cycleway onto a road way at intersections; and
- there is significant housing development occurring beyond this point, such as the Glebe Estate, Oakdowns Estate and of course the proposed Ralph's Bay (Lauderdale Quay) development all of which will place more commuter pressure

on the road, which could in turn be moderated if we can encourage more commuter cyclists instead of more vehicles onto the road.

Surely a more sensible and viable long term approach to the increasing traffic problem and all of these other issues would be to encourage more people to cycle, and a core part of this would be having good, safe, well-routed cycling infrastructure?

To place this in some context, we are regular commuter cyclists. We cycle to and from either Acton Park (where my partner lives) or Mount Nelson (where I live) to the Hobart CBD at least four times a week. Cycling in from Acton Park is around 20 kilometres and takes us around 50 minutes. In peak morning traffic the drive in a car will take from 20 - 40 minutes, largely depending on how congested traffic on the bridge is, plus the 10-15 minutes it takes us to find a park and walk into work. So even as far out as Acton Park, cycling (50 minutes) is a very viable commuter option when compared to cars (30 – 55 minutes). Given the savings we also make in petrol, car maintenance and gym fees it actually becomes an incredibly attractive option, and we probably live further away and have a harder ride than a large majority of Eastern Shore commuters.

I believe that having a safe, well-routed (cyclist don't like having to go hundreds of metres out of the way to get from point A to B as is plainly visible by the well worn track running alongside the South Arm Highway near the top of the hill where cyclists prefer to battle their way along a muddy track than take the longer, steeper detour through Buckingham Drive), predominantly off road cycling route is one of the best ways of encouraging people to get on their bikes, and that is the essence of why I am just so disappointed to see this strategic off road cycle route severed.

I strongly believe that we should be taking the exact opposite approach. We should be looking at improving the bikeway all the way out to Lauderdale. From there, the route would link with the 'Tangara Trail' which would then open up the whole of the South Arm to safe recreational riding. To me this would be an investment in the health of both current and future Tasmanians.

I have already contacted the DIER Project Manager about why an underpass was rejected as an option here, and I admit that there are a number of compelling arguments put forward. However what I haven't seen is an economic and social justification of why the link to Oceana Drive is important enough to justify severing an existing strategic cycling link reaching out beyond this point.

We mentioned before that there is evidence that moving from a foot path to a roadway, especially an intersection, is dangerous for cyclists. The May / June 2007 edition of *The Australian Cyclist* magazine had an article on road cycle safety. The article noted that "the next [second] most common crash type was cyclists being struck by cars when riding from the footway across an intersection or onto a road and being hit by an oncoming motor vehicle." It then went on to note that "In over 60 percent of crashes, the cyclist was deemed to be "responsible" for the action that precipitated the fatal crash. This was particularly the case at intersections where the cyclist was either riding through the intersection on the road or moving from the footway into the intersection."

The point I think this makes is that moving cyclists off a continuous bike track, and forcing them to stop, press a dedicated cyclists light crossing button, wait, and then cross an intersection will increase the risk of accidents, because quite simply lots of cyclists don't do it. They ride down towards the intersection, glance across their

shoulder, things look OK, and so they try and dash across and we end up with the high accident statistics we see above. You only need observe cyclist behaviour at the dedicated cycle lights at the Evans and Davey Street intersection near Victoria docks to see that this is the case. My real concern in this regard is young children riding their bikes in this area. Children just can't judge traffic as well as adults.

The best way of avoiding this, and at the same time encourage more people to get out onto their bikes, is to not force cyclists through busy intersections. Again I ask the question of whether a social cost benefit analysis has been done? Do you have something you can show the parents of the first child that gets hit crossing this intersection to let them know that we had to have this intersection because it saves two minutes of driving time for the residents in the local area, and we couldn't afford the extra investment in a cycling under or over pass for them?

Some other specific issues we ask you to consider in finalising your decision:

1. This proposal severs a safe, off-road cycle route for any children living east of Oceana Drive. Currently this route enables any children east of here to safely walk or ride their bikes to Howrah Primary School without having to cross any busy intersections. In our safety conscious society how many parents will this now dissuade from allowing their children to ride to school? Will these be the same children that our media regularly reports as becoming increasingly overweight and unhealthy and who will place increasing pressure on our health system into the future? Perhaps part of the Social Cost Benefit Analysis would include the Department considering placing a school traffic controller there in the mornings and evenings to encourage parents to let their school children to use this route if the cycle way is severed?
2. Experienced commuter and road cyclists, such as my partner and I, are now going to be presented with a decision just past the Buckingham Drive junction from Rokeby. We currently leave the bike track at this point, cycle down the road, and rejoin the cycleway via a small dirt road. Under the South Arm Upgrade proposal, at this point, if we rejoin the bike track, shortly thereafter we'll have to pull up at this new intersection, press the bicycling lights, wait several minutes for them to come on, and then resume our trip. When cyclists are out training, or when we're commuting, we're just like everyone else, we don't like sitting around waiting for the lights to change. My preference is going to be to just continue down the road and try and get the green light like everyone else getting to work in their cars – it will be a lot faster for me. I also believe this is my right as a road user. I only use bike tracks if they are both convenient and safe.

Knowing that many cyclists will make this decision of proceeding down the hill has some flow on implications for traffic flow and safety. The obvious issue to me is that as the left hand lane at the intersection will now be a turn left only lane, cyclists are going to be moving out into the traffic as soon as there is a break in traffic flow to "take a lane" so that they can continue through the intersection. Again, this is not ideal as it disrupts traffic flow and is a bit more dangerous (it's why people build off road cycle ways), but cyclists like us are quite used to this. When not riding in from Lauderdale, we cycle down from Mt Nelson and we come straight down the Southern Outlet because it is by far the quickest way to get to the Hobart CBD.

Again, if an underpass is not implemented, then can your Department consider improved cycling signage warning motorists to be aware of cyclists continuing straight ahead at this junction? More pro-actively, in other Countries I have seen ideas such as using a different colouring for the bitumen in the left hand turning lane (eg. green or red bitumen) with clear directional arrows showing that cyclists may proceed straight ahead from this lane. This makes motorists more aware of cyclists on the road, and saves the cyclist moving further out into the traffic than is necessary and frees up traffic flow.

On the same note, the current road shoulder ends just past this intersection. It would be ideal to have either an easy way for cyclists to flow straight onto the bike track at this point, or have a large shoulder continue on the South Arm Road to the top of Clarnece street, with an offramp connection there to easily exit South Arm Highway and get onto Clarence Street.

3. If you must continue with your proposal, then I have seen that Cycling South have advocated that “a green bicycle lantern [be] installed at the crossing which automatically changes to green when the signals turn green for motor vehicles, rather than cyclists being required to press a button and wait for the bicycle lantern to activate. This treatment is used on cycleways in other parts of Australia without incident and would maintain the level of service for cyclists.” I strongly support this proposal, but would also encourage the clear signage for motorists to be aware of cyclists entering the road (see my previous comments above about coloured lane ways) and the consideration of having turn red turn arrows with a one or two second delay on them to allow cyclists to get onto the street before motorists start turning into Oceana drive.

Finally, has your Department considered other time saving or safety ‘offsets’ that could be employed along the route to compensate cyclists for the increased delay and safety risks from this road connection? I have already alluded to the desirability of extending the cycleway alongside the South Arm Highway instead of the current Buckingham Drive cycle route which I suspect is seldom used.

Further out in Rokeby, the intersections of Grange Road West and Diosma Street and Burtonia Street can be quite dangerous with motorists accelerating off South Arm Road between gaps in the traffic, only to discover a slow moving cyclist puffing his way across the road in front of them.

Then there is the section of road between Horsham Road and Acton Road. This is one of the most dangerous sections of road I have cycled on with poor lighting, steep hilly sections, poor sight distance and a narrow, gravelly shoulder. We have often discussed the idea (usually after a close encounter with a car when cycling home) of having a dynamic-warning system such as the yellow frost and ice warning signs which flash with two yellow lights to warn motorists that this is a time of high frost. This could be a cost effective way of warning motorists about cyclists on this section of road.

Such a system could just be a standard yellow cyclists warning sign with a pressure pad activation system that cyclists could ride across (eg. build a short section of bike lane and put it across this). The yellow warning lights would then just flash for 10 minutes which would give most cyclists ample time to get through the section and then turn themselves off. Until such time as this section of road is also upgraded, and

hopefully wider shoulders or a bike path installed, I think this would be an excellent way of improving cycling safety on a key section of road.

In closing, I do understand that this Government has to work within budget constraints, but at the same time the way we tackle issues like this today will set the foundation for either a healthy or increasingly unhealthy community into the future. In this light, I'd like to think we elected a Government with vision, one that is prepared to reconsider whether cutting an existing major arterial cycle way with a three lane roadway is the best decision, and if it is really that essential, at least one that tries to find ways to offset this decision by initiating other initiatives elsewhere along the route to make sure that more and more of us get out there and ride our bikes.

Maybe there are other solutions out there, maybe an overpass rather than an underpass, maybe it's possible to divert cycle traffic from near the Church, down Holland Court and build an underpass under Oceana drive at an alternate location? I don't know what the best solutions are, but I would really like to think that we have exhausted them all before this decision is made.

Yours,

John Dawson