

Should Vancouver require helmets  
for planned new city bike system

A group brainstorm from World City Bikes

07-Feb-08

Eric Britton & Associates

The World City Bike project at <http://www.worldcitybike.org>

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## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

### Question:

Should Vancouver require helmets for its new city bike system?

Paris, Friday, 8 February 2008

### **1. Conclusion and Recommendation<sup>1</sup>**

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1. No. The British Columbia Bicycle Helmet Law (attached) should be amended to provide exemptions for users of the new public bicycle service.
2. If this exception is not made, it is my professional view that the present project as a city-wide PBS implementation will not meet its ambitious objectives that would put it on a par with the best city bike projects in the world, and thus should not be advanced beyond the present pre-study stage.
3. If the law is not amended however, there still are good possibilities for a much smaller, less intensely used shared bike project or demonstration, but at a lower level of ambition than that presently being discussed as a showplace project for Vancouver during the 2010 Winter Olympics. And despite its greatly reduced ambition level such a reduced scale project would, if carefully planned, be useful for the city in its long term program to scale back private car use in the center.
4. Far more important than mandating helmets when it comes to public safety is the matter of securing the conditions of safe cycling in your city. This is a sine qua non for any city bike project, and the means for doing so are well known to bicycle and traffic planners in many places, including in Vancouver. Getting the supporting infrastructure right is the real bottom line, both in terms of ensuring safety and to guarantee the chances for the success of the project.

Eric Britton  
Managing Director, EcoPlan International

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<sup>1</sup> While these conclusions are essentially based on my long experience as a city cyclist and active participant in and observer of bike and transport projects in many cities, my recommendations as presented here have been tested and to an extent modified and enhanced by the process of international peer discussions and feedback process summarized here. I thank my colleagues for sharing with me their ideas and views on earlier drafts of this note, which permit me to make these recommendations in full confidence..

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

### 2. Summary Background

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Basically there are two issues here. They need to be sorted out one at a time. First, the more general issue: should cyclists be obliged by law to wear helmets? Second: should “city cyclists (i.e, mainly those who are using the new PBS systems, but also anyone else on a bike in a central area that has made provision for safe cycling) be required to wear helmets.

During the last decade of the last century a slowly growing number of cities and public authorities around the world started to build and expand leisure cycling paths and trails. The greater part of these new facilities were built in areas that did not have a strong bicycling culture and where for many reasons few people actually used bicycles for daily transportation (and those who did often found themselves in high risk situations with mixed traffic the norm).

These expanded leisure facilities naturally brought in more cyclists, with the result that there were more accidents, and these often became news items. As a result in a number of places in North America, Australia/New Zealand and northern Europe well-meant laws were passed mandating helmets for all cyclists. (It being, by the way, a lot cheaper to pass such a law than to make the public investment necessary to ensure safe cycling for all in and around d the city.)

The case for wearing helmets was largely approved by medical authorities and a number of cycling organizations at the time, on the grounds that a good helmet offers protection from certain types of accidents. If all the assumptions are born out the case for these “partial assessments” looks pretty convincing. Reality however moves in other ways. Once you step outside of the partial assessment assumptions, the real world data is uncertain and ambiguous. (See attached discussions and references)

It only took a few years for other views to emerge. Among other things it was pointed out that (a) not all helmets are actually good enough to provide the needed protection; (b) more often than not they are not properly adjusted to provide this protection; and (c) in any event the clash between cyclist and motor vehicles are of such a level of violence that the helmet is rarely of much help in such cases.

More than that, some studies started to show that mandating helmets actually work to reduced cycling, a finding which is consistent with the observation whereby any additional barrier to using a transportation option works to reduce demand. This brings about corresponding losses in healthy activity, kinder and gentler cities,

Moreover, let us consider what happens in cities with heavy use of cycling for daily transport within the city limits. I offer the examples of cycling in cities across the Netherlands and Denmark, the two main cycling capitals of the world, as well as in the various city bike projects that are coming on line in places like Paris, Barcelona, Lyons and a rapidly growing number of other cities around the world. None of these cities mandate helmets, and if you go out on the street and look you will see few helmets. You will see some and this is, in my view, a wise but entirely personal choice.

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### 3. Some useful reading and references:

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- Bicycle helmet research web links - <http://www.cycle-helmets.com/links.html>
- Entrenchment of Helmet Laws in Australian Road Rules - <http://members.tip.net.au/~psvansch/crag/natroad/>
- Efficacy of Helmet Wearing For Cyclists - <http://members.tip.net.au/~psvansch/crag/natroad/natrd-a.htm>
- Australian Helmet Experience - <http://www.helmets.org/veloaust.htm>
- Advocacy should be based on Evaluation - <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/328/7444/888>
- Helmets - Frequently Asked Questions - <http://www.magma.ca/~ocbc/hfaq.html#a0>
- "The case against cycle helmets and legislation" - [www.ctcyorkshirehumber.org.uk/campaigns/velo.htm](http://www.ctcyorkshirehumber.org.uk/campaigns/velo.htm)

#### Organizations that advocate helmet use

- Bicycle Helmet Safety Institute: US organization promoting helmet use .
- Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust: UK-based organization campaigning for a mandatory helmet law for children

#### Sites critical of cycle helmets

- Cyclists Rights Action Group (Australia )
- The Vehicular Cyclist (Canada)
- Mandatory Bicycle Helmet Law in Western Australia
- Cycling Health (New Zealand)

On the next two pages you will find the text of the British Columbia Bicycle Helmet Law of 1995. It is followed by a number discussions from an international expert group including representatives of cycling associations, statisticians, experts in risk assessment, and public policy analysts. These statements by and large reinforce the main recommendations of the author above.

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### 4. British Columbia Bicycle Helmet Law

*MOTOR\_VEHICLE\_AMENDMENT\_ACT\_(No.2),\_1995 - Source: [http://www.bhsi.org/bc\\_law.htm](http://www.bhsi.org/bc_law.htm)*

11. Section 120 is amended

(a) in subsection (1) by adding the following paragraphs:

(b.1) that a person operating or riding as a passenger on a cycle on a path or way designated under paragraph (b.3) must properly wear a bicycle safety helmet that

(i) is designated as an approved bicycle safety helmet under section 185.1 (4) (a),

or

(ii) meets the standards and specifications prescribed under section 185.1 (4) (b);

(b.2) that a parent or guardian of a person under the age of 16 years must not authorize or knowingly permit the person to operate or ride as a passenger on a cycle on a path or way designated under paragraph (b.3) if that person is not properly wearing a bicycle safety helmet that

(i) is designated as an approved bicycle safety helmet under section 185.1 (4) (a),

or

(ii) meets the standards and specifications prescribed under section 185.1 (4) (b);

(b.3) for the designation of paths or ways within the municipality, other than paths or ways that are highways or are located on private property, for the purposes of a bylaw made under paragraph (b.1) or (b.2);

(b.4) for the exemption of any person or class of persons from a bylaw made under paragraph (b.1) or (b.2) and prescribing conditions for those exemptions; , and

(b) by adding the following subsection:

(1.2) Despite subsection (1) (s), a municipality may not impose imprisonment or a fine of more than \$100 for the contravention of a bylaw made under subsection (1) (b.1) or (b.2).

22. The following section is added:

#### Bicycle safety helmets

185.1 (1) A person commits an offence if that person operates or rides as a passenger on a cycle on a highway and is not properly wearing a bicycle safety helmet that

(a) is designated as an approved bicycle safety helmet under subsection (4) (a),

or

(b) meets the standards and specifications prescribed under subsection (4) (b).

(2) A parent or guardian of a person under the age of 16 years commits an offence if the parent or guardian authorizes or knowingly permits the person to operate or ride as a passenger on a cycle on a highway if that person is not properly wearing a bicycle safety helmet that

(a) is designated as an approved bicycle safety helmet under subsection (4) (a),

or

(b) meets the standards and specifications prescribed under subsection (4) (b).

(3) A person who is convicted of an offence under subsection (1) or (2) is liable to a fine of not more than \$100.

(4) The superintendent may make regulations as follows:

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- (a) designating a helmet as an approved bicycle safety helmet for the purposes of this section;
  - (b) prescribing standards and specifications for bicycle safety helmets.
- (5) Regulations made under subsection (4) (b) may adopt by reference, in whole or in part, standards or specifications published by a national or international standards association, as amended from time to time.
- (6) The Lieutenant Governor in Council may make regulations as follows:
- (a) providing for and requiring the identification and marking of bicycle safety helmets;
  - (b) exempting any person or class of persons from the requirements of this section and prescribing conditions for those exemptions.

*Note: In 2000 the University of North Carolina conducted [an evaluation project for this law](#). It showed substantial increases in helmet use after the law was passed.*

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

### 5. Discussions, recommendations from World City Bike Forum

Message of 29 Jan 2008 by Michael Yeates, Convenor, Cyclists Urban Speed limit Taskforce, Australia

Reference: <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/WorldCityBike/message/15>

I note the evaluation project referred to below (but I have not read it).

The following may reflect a bias from Australia's experience.

But I know myself from time spent in Europe cycling without a helmet just how much of an inconvenience a helmet is for many trips.

And to add to that, I recall several times after being in Europe where on my return, I just got on my bike and cycled off, only to realise later that I had forgotten my helmet. I did not feel the need for it ... I just realised I had broken/changed previous habitual behaviour.

However any evaluation needs to include sufficient before and after data in regard to fatalities, serious, long term and minor injuries as well as "exposure" data ... AND compliance data ... amongst other data eg gender, age, previous cycling experience, crash location and type/cause, etc..

These data sets are not easy. Indeed they are VERY complex relationships to assess and in addition, sufficiently similar events and outcomes (before and after as well as comparatively) appear to be so rare as to make statistical comparisons unreliable at best.

It is far easier to rely on partial assessments as most seem to be.

Some examples of what is needed to be included and assessed and what data is flawed or insufficient include ...

KSI data is often not sufficiently reliable in terms of cause and effect eg was the crash a secondary outcome of some other situation which if it were controlled would reduce or eliminate the crash type etc and thus the need for a helmet.

- How does one ensure a helmet would make a difference without control testing with and without helmets in identical situations.
- How can "risk compensation" behaviour be accounted for.
- How good is the exposure data eg do more people use more dangerous roads (say rather than back streets) once they are wearing helmets so they feel safer (esp if they believe the pro-helmet message) and are therefore more obvious and if not filtering through a network of back streets, easier to see and count.

Hospital admissions, ambulance attendance, insurance claims, police crash reports etc rarely agree so which should be used.

Many injuries and some fatalities occur on paths that are not part of the road system so don't get counted in some categories ... including it would seem, those that promote paths as 'safe' and roads as 'dangerous' and don't want accurate records of the dangers of paths.

And then there is the question of whether and the extent to which feeling safer with a helmet (or on a path not a road) may expose the wearer to greater risk because others think the cyclist is better protected.

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Lots of the issues are very unresolved and thus ANY claim that 'mandatory' helmet wearing is beneficial needs to be closely examined for what was not included in the assessment.

Early reports in Australia claimed success from (i) higher compliance and/or (ii) reduced KSIs and hospital injury reports ... but failed to assess exposure.

It has been claimed that compulsory helmet wearing reduced cycling dramatically in Australia but that too can't be easily demonstrated as there was no before and after exposure data.

For the statistical and data arguments from an Australian-international perspective, see Dr Dorothy Robinson and for hospital v police reports see Dr Bruce Robinson ... on the web and in journals etc. See sites like <http://www.cycle-helmets.com/links.html> <http://www.helmets.org/veloaust.htm> <http://members.tip.net.au/~psvansch/crag/natroad/> <http://www.bmj.com/cgi/eletters/328/7444/888> <http://www.magma.ca/~ocbc/hfaq.html> for just some of the related and highly relevant discussion.

It is worth noting that the speed limit on urban and suburban main roads in Australia is 60km/h or higher ... unless reduced to 50km/h by special agreement in relatively rare circumstances.

So would a reduction to 50km/h on all or most main roads produce a better outcome than compulsory helmet wearing? How would "outcome" be assessed? Just for cyclists ... or for all road users?

Then there is the BMA study and others that support the epidemiological value of increased population health resulting from more people cycling more as of greater "value" than the risk of injury or death to individuals (which might increase with increased exposure until a critical mass is reached when it will then fall to levels such as those in the NL ... see for example [http://www.fiab-onlus.it/andare/helm\\_gb.doc](http://www.fiab-onlus.it/andare/helm_gb.doc) ) ... and as mentioned previously, the view that other transport users should be compelled to wear helmets which would show a far greater benefit ... and thus that cycling (carefully for the conditions and with appropriate experience etc) is relatively safer than those other modes ..., contrary to the implications of campaigns supporting helmet wearing compulsion.

Promote helmet wearing as a precaution and to compensate for the risks being taken? Yes maybe if the message is not confusing.

Bring your own helmet with you so you can ride a CityBike? Yes of course, if you wish.

But no compulsion.

Best to make the roads used by all cyclists (and others) safer (for all users including "CityBikers" ) so that all injury types are reduced ... indeed that should be the aim, not just reducing some head injury of some cyclists by a focus (only?) on helmets.

Michael Yeates  
Convenor  
Cyclists Urban Speedlimit Taskforce  
Australia

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

**From:** Colin Clarke [mailto:COLIN@vood.freemove.co.uk]

**Sent:** Tuesday, 29 January 2008 14:19

Hi Eric

The following information may assist your helmet discussions, please pass on and any questions I will try to answer.

I wrote the VeloCity 2007 report "The case against cycle helmets and legislation" detailing an association between helmet use and accident involvement. The report can be viewed at [www.ctcyorkshirehumber.org.uk/campaigns/velo.htm](http://www.ctcyorkshirehumber.org.uk/campaigns/velo.htm) or at <http://cyclingedinburgh.files.wordpress.com/2007/10/colin-clarke-velo-city.pdf>

In Canada, for children aged 5-19, 1994-95/1997-98, cycle helmet legislation provinces had an estimated reduction in injuries (head and other) of 869 from a population base of 3,262,595, 0.02663%. Provinces without legislation had an estimated reduction in injuries of 836 from a population base of 2,669,985, 0.03131%<sup>2</sup>. Percentage reduction in injuries was 24.1% for legislation provinces and 24.2% for provinces without legislation. Survey data from British Columbia indicates an estimated 13% reduction for cyclists aged 0-30 years, 1995-99. The survey information does not discuss weather conditions in detail but it seems 1995 had the wetter period with nearby Seattle precipitation for July and August 1995 –3.15 inches, 1999 – 2.1 inches. BC also had an increase in population over the period 95 –99, (3.282 million in 1991 and 3.907 million in 2001) and invested in cycling facilities. Since 1990 Vancouver has built sixteen bikeways that connect to form a network. Taking into account all these aspects it can be seen the helmet law discouraged some people from cycling.

Across Canada, cyclist's length of stay in hospital for head injuries increased by 60% from 4.3 days in 1994/95 to 6.9 days in 2003-04 therefore serious head injuries may have increased. The number of deaths due to all circulatory diseases in 2001 was approximately 62000 and in the same year there were 60 deaths from cycling. The priority is ensuring no one is discouraged from cycling. In BC between 1994/95 and 2004/05, for those aged 12 to 19 years, 17% changed from being active to moderately active. Considering the health of many people are involved was it too much for Canada to conduct proper annual surveys of cyclists, especially with the results from Australia. The overall health of the public should have required greater care. If you view [http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by\\_date&days=7#2451](http://injuryprevention.bmj.com/cgi/eletters?lookup=by_date&days=7#2451) you may start to see cycling was discouraged in legislation provinces.

Hoping this helps a little.

- Macpherson AK, Teresa M, Macarthur C, Chipman ML, Wright JG, Parkins PC; Impact of Mandatory Helmet Legislation on Bicycle-Related Head Injuries in Children: A Population-Based Study; Pediatrics Vol 110, No 5 Nov, 2002.
- Calculations based on data in Table 1 and 2, Ref 1.
- Foss RD, Beirness DJ, Bicycle Helmet Use in British Columbia: Effects of the Helmet Use Law. 2000
- NCDC: Climate At A Glance, Seattle WA, accessed 3.9.07
- Statistics Canada, British Columbia, population.
- The Vancouver Bicycle Network, <http://www.cityvancouver.be.ca/engsvet/transport/cycling/general.htm>
- Head Injuries in Canada, A Decade of Change, Canadian Institute of Health Information, August 2006
- Statistics Canada, Health indicators – Cat no. 82-221, Vol. 2005 No 1.
- Transport Canada, <http://www.tc.gc.ca/roadsafety/tp/tp13951/2001/page7.htm#toc25>
- Statistics Canada, CANSIM table 104-7040, <http://cansim2.statcan.ca/cgi-win/CNSMCGI.EXE>
- Robinson DL; No clear evidence from countries that have enforced the wearing of helmets; BMJ Vol 332, 25 March 2006.

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

From **Dave Holladay**

In a message dated 26/01/2008, S.Norton@dpmms.cam.ac.uk writes:

It seems to me that incorporating compulsory cycle helmet wearing in a city bike scheme would kill it unless some means was used of enabling people to borrow the helmet as well as the bike. How could this be done ?

This would presumably require helmets to be attached to bikes in a way that was secure against theft. I suspect that if such a system became widespread it would lead to an increase in helmet wearing anyway because it would avoid the hassle of having to carry a helmet around.

This forms a challenge which some of us believe may actually get the Australians and NZ plus several US States to see commonsense and dump their compulsory helmet wearing laws. It is possible to provide a helmet in a separate container, unlocked when the associated bike is hired, and there are some designs of helmet that pack down into a small space - naturally the traditional sports protection - the bunch of bananas traditionally in leather - but of course that does not meet the standards designed to be met by polystyrene foam.....

A shared helmets system has a serious number of Health & Safety issues which the promoters of helmet wearing will need to get some answers too.

- 1) The material used on a typical helmet is such that the helmets should be replaced regularly,
- 2) it should be replaced if the helmet has been knocked or dropped heavily (very difficult to monitor for a common-user item). Wear parts like straps & buckles need to be replaced or the helmet scrapped
- 3) the helmet should fit properly to work properly. A badly fitting helmet can be more dangerous than wearing no helmet at all.
- 4) the range of 'heads' may not be accommodated by the helmets fitting range - it is calculated that there are around 80,000 potential cyclists in the UK population who cannot buy a helmet from the ranges normally available.
- 5) hygiene - scalp diseases are on the increase. any shared helmets will need to have disposable liners, and disinfectant treatment between users as an effort to minimise this risk - but not eliminate it.

I've often challenged this at shows like Cycle where the organisers staff of try-out stands insist you wear a helmet and offer you a scabby thing which is passed around every person who comes there for a test-ride. and probably doesn't fit you - they never have one to fit me! Maybe we can make them post a health warning for those signing the disclaimer and being told to wear those helmets

*"I understand that the organisers or cycle hirer requires me to wear a helmet, and if I opt to use a helmet provided by the them I recognise the risks noted and otherwise of using a common-user helmet which include :transmitting scalp infections, wearing a second hand helmet which may have been dropped or hit causing unseen damage, wearing a helmet which may not fit me properly, and cause injury or otherwise through this.*

*In the event of any injury or infection I note that I have carried out my own checks and precautions and therefore have no claim on the organiser in the event, or cycle hirer providing any helmet I am required to wear, in respect of injury or illness caused by the defects noted which may have been present in the helmets provided."*

**Dave Holladay**  
Glasgow

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

**From:** John Adams [mailto:john.adams@ucl.ac.uk]  
**Sent:** Friday, 25 January 2008 16:07  
**To:** eric.britton@ecoplan.org

Helmets and seatbelts and risk compensation

The evidence is overwhelming that such safety measures alter behaviour in a way that increases risk taking and often redistributes the burden of risk. Over a year ago I gave a lecture in Amsterdam about excessive risk aversion entitled "Are the Dutch as mad as the English? a comparison of Dutch and English approaches to risk management".

The audience and I quickly agreed that the Dutch were not as stupidly risk averse as the English - but heading in the same direction.

At one point in my lecture I said that I had been in Amsterdam for two days and had seen thousands and thousands of cyclists and only one cycle helmet - and went on to observe that the Dutch had a vastly superior cycling safety record (and vastly lower death rate per kilometre cycled) than the English. At this point a man in the audience put up his hand and said that I had been standing in the wrong place. I must have looked puzzled. He explained that the following morning, just before the start of school, he could take me to a place in Amsterdam and show me a file of young children on bicycles, all wearing helmets and day-glow jackets, cycling to the British school. I rested my case.

I've put on my website some of my contributions to this debate. Some go back a few years.

<http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/Risk%20Compensation%20and%20the%20cycle%20helmet%20debate.pdf>

<http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/12/Seat%20belts%20for%20significance.pdf>

<http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/failure%20of%20seatbelt%20legislation.pdf>

<http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/SAE%20seatbelts.pdf>

<http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/motorcycle%20helmets.pdf>

Prof. John Adams  
blog: [www.john-adams.co.uk](http://www.john-adams.co.uk)  
email: John.Adams@UCL.ac.uk  
Geography Department  
University College London

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**From:** Todd Edelman, Green Idea Factory [mailto:edelman@greenidea.eu]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 6 February 2008 14:31

I agree that helmets should be required for all children under 15 or 14... and no one else.

BUT... The tend to be excessive about encouraging helmets it seems will bring us back - over and over - to the interest in politicians of making them mandatory. Is education encouragement? How to have a balance (if thats what you want)? I am not sure how to solve it...

AND... Having helmets required only for sport cyclists? How to enforce this? What is a "sport cyclist"? How is it defined? Clothing? Type of bike? Cadence?

Also you also mention only public bike users and no one in between... what about messengers? Commuters?

Again, I would only base it on age. Maybe helmet use can be part of a education campaign for new cyclists children and otherwise, and booklet about helmets included with new bike....or... when you buy a mobile phone it says to take care whilst driving on instructions... do we need more than that?

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

----- Original Message -----

From: "Kerry Wood" <[kerry.wood@paradise.net.nz](mailto:kerry.wood@paradise.net.nz)>

To: <[WorldTransport@yahoo.com](mailto:WorldTransport@yahoo.com)>

Sent: Friday, January 25, 2008 4:57 PM

Subject: WorldTransport Forum New forum on City Bikes - An invitation

Thanks again Eric

Michael: An even worse problem with compulsory cycle helmet wearing it that in New Zealand it has been allowed to become a substitute for policy, with helmet-wearing statistics and enforcement campaigns but precious little else. Thankfully, this 'policy' seems to be changing.

Kerry Wood

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**From:** COLIN CLARKE [mailto:[kathleen@vood.freemove.co.uk](mailto:kathleen@vood.freemove.co.uk)]

**Sent:** Thursday, 7 February 2008 12:39

**To:** [eric.britton@ecoplan.org](mailto:eric.britton@ecoplan.org)

**Subject:** Re: Statement of recommendation to Vancouver team concerning helmets

Hi Eric

It reads OK, possibly another read just to check presentation aspect.

The data I have considered in the last few days shows even children are probably better off without helmets. All my data needs checking before I try to have it published.

There is a higher risk when wearing the larger sized helmet due to higher rotational accelerations on impact, see <http://www.cyclehelmets.org/mf.html?1182> for details. It has been recognised since the work of Holbourn (1943) that rotational acceleration of the head plays a major part in brain injury.

If you look at the CIHI report, page 16, Fig 8 shows 'length of stay' in hospital increased from 4.3 days to 6.9 days, up 60%, so to recommend helmets is very iffy indeed.

Head Injuries in Canada: A Decade of Change (1994-1995 to 2003-2004)

[http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/en/downloads/analysis\\_ntr\\_2006\\_e.pdf](http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/en/downloads/analysis_ntr_2006_e.pdf)

[http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/en/downloads/analysis\\_ntr\\_2006\\_e.pdf](http://secure.cihi.ca/cihiweb/en/downloads/analysis_ntr_2006_e.pdf)

Your presentation should be Ok with most people, but really helmets information should say they require more research to ensure all safety aspects are fully investigated, to indicate there are areas of concern.

"We would like to see an overall health assessment of helmet laws to ensure no harm is occurring" may be worth a mention.

Cheers Colin

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

**From:** bernie@oybike.com [mailto:bernie@oybike.com]

**Sent:** Thursday, 7 February 2008 09:39

**To:** eric.britton@ecoplan.org

**Subject:** Re: Statement of recommendation to Vancouver team concerning helmets

Eric

Whilst I personally agree with the position you are taking on the subject of helmets, and my own view that considering a bicycle as a car without an engine is illogical, the logical position of a bicycle is a pedestrian with wheels, which is how they are treated on mainland Europe.

However in the case that a city cannot change their position for PUB bikes, we can secure in a locked box, using our current cable system combined with the combination lock we use, to supply a helmet with either disposable hygienic head covers or a automated spray disinfectant each time the box cover is opened.

Kind Regards

Bernie Hanning  
OYBike Systems, UK

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**From:** Morten Lange [mailto:morten7an@yahoo.com]

**Sent:** Wednesday, 6 February 2008 22:03

**To:** eric.britton@newmobility.org

**Subject:** Re: Statement of recommendation to Vancouver team concerning helmets

Hi Eric

I think your statement might be a tactically optimised one, rather than optimised for being in sync with the best available evidence.

To me it sounds like some kind of compromise. And that may very well be the wisest way forward.

The positive part is that by saying that helmets should be recommended, and even mandatory for children, perhaps more politicians etc will be willing to listen to the rest of the argumentation.

I feel there is a risk, though, that you might run into inconsistencies, if you are going to argue for this stance.

If one takes in the "whole picture", I think promotion of helmets is bad, also for children. And of course there are many bicycle campaigners that agree with this view, based on a thorough review of the evidence and the arguments.

But I cannot recall anyone saying they are against people using helmets. Still, there are arguments to the effect that widespread helmet usage on the population level is detrimental to public health, the environment and for cycling.

Having looked at the PDF you attached, I see no-one arguing for promotion of helmets, and no-one arguing for helmet compulsion for children. But as I said in opening, it may well be that baby steps and compromises are necessary, for the time being.

Best Regards,  
Morten Lange

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

**From:** Ralf Kalupner | nextbike GmbH [mailto:kalupner@nextbike.de]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 6 February 2008 21:01  
**To:** eric.britton@ecoplan.org  
**Subject:** AW: Statement of recommendation to Vancouver team concerning helmets

Hi Eric,

we don't have problems without helmets and we don't have problems with them. In New Zealand they must have helmets. So we lock them simply together with the bike. If the customer or the city want helmets we offer. If nobody insist in helmets, we don't offer because it is much effort. hope this is an answer you can work with.

best regards

Ralf Kalupner  
neXtbike systems, Germany

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-----Original Message-----

**From:** Tim Caswell UK [mailto:tcaswell@vipre.com]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 6 February 2008 18:58  
**Subject:** Re: Statement of recommendation to Vancouver team concerning helmets

Eric,

Thanks for this.

I entirely agree that mandating the use of cycle helmets for all members of a cycle scheme will be a huge barrier to its uptake and use. Responsible adults should be able to make their own risk assessments ! (although we all know that adults often fail to do this in many walks of life)

I would seriously consider making helmets available through the hire process but I don't believe any suitable mechanism yet exists that provides a safe and reliable helmet for the user. Even if one can be provided automatically that fits, the helmet has no known provenance in terms of previous use and damage which may negate its safety. Try taking a baby seat for a car back to a retailer even if its still unused and in its wrapper - they refuse on the basis that it may have been dropped / damaged and therefore its safety certification is invalidated.

Our solution in Bristol is to point users towards nearest cycling retailers from each station, and negotiate a deal for helmet purchase with those retailers for bike club members. Perhaps getting sponsorship from a helmet manufacturer etc. to make it as easy and simple as possible for members to purchase one from a reputable retailer who provides the right advise, at reasonable cost. ie being responsible as an operator without constraining business.

Best Regards

Tim Casswell  
MD. Vipre

## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

**From:** John Adams [mailto:john.adams@ucl.ac.uk]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, 6 February 2008 14:52  
**To:** eric.britton@ecoplan.org  
**Subject:** further thoughts

Eric

A very important intervention. I agree with your recommendations other than (see below)

But I think that in paragraph 4 you have omitted the most important reason to doubt the efficacy of compulsory use of helmets - risk compensation.

On my website I have a link to an exchange published in Injury Prevention - ("Risk Compensation Theory Should be Subject to Systematic Reviews of the Scientific Evidence: Debate About Cycle Helmets" Injury Prevention (2002;8:e1-e1)) - <http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/Risk%20Compensation%20and%20the%20cycle%20helmet%20debate.pdf> . This is a published exchange between Mayer Hillman and me, and the principal advocates of compulsion.

The same argument can be applied to motorcycle helmets - an old article on my website but never refuted: Public Safety Legislation and the Risk Compensation Hypothesis: The example of Motorcycle Helmet Legislation, Environment and Planning C: 1983 vol.1 pages 193-203 - <http://john-adams.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/motorcycle%20helmets.pdf>.

Thinking slowly, I now do not agree with your recommendations on the following:

3. Helmets should not be encouraged. A year ago I was invited to give some lectures in Amsterdam. One was entitled "Are the Dutch as Mad as the English" - a comparative look at excessive risk aversion. We quickly decided that the English were madder, but the Dutch were headed in the same direction. At one point in my talk I observed that I had been in Amsterdam for 2 days and seen many thousands of cyclists, but only one cycle helmet - and that the Dutch had a vastly superior safety record as measured in deaths per kilometre cycled. Someone in the audience interjected and said that the following morning he could show me a file of young children on their way to school - all wearing day-glow jackets and helmets - all cycling to the British school.

4. Helmets should not be mandatory - period, or in Britain - full stop.

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## Should Vancouver require helmets for new city bike system?

**From:** Sebastian Buehrmann [mailto:s.buehrmann@rupprecht-consult.eu]

**Sent:** Wednesday, 6 February 2008 13:50

**Subject:** RE: Statement of recommendation to Vancouver team concerning helmets

Hi Eric,

I agree with your view on the Vancouver case. I think helmets should be encouraged, but not made obligatory. For children should be obligatory.

Don't know if you came across this source already „ Pucher and Buehler “Making Cycling Irresistible” Transport Reviews, Vol. 28, 2008”. It can help to make a stronger point:

Excerpt page 15-16:

“In the USA, much of the effort to improve cyclist safety has focused on increasing helmet use, if necessary by law, especially for children. Thus, it is important to emphasize that the much safer cycling in northern Europe is definitely not due to widespread use of safety helmets.

On the contrary, in the Netherlands, with the safest cycling of any country, less than one percent of adult cyclists wear helmets, and even among children, only 3-5% wear helmets (Dutch Bicycling Council, 2006; Netherlands Ministry of Transport, 2006). The Dutch cycling experts and planners interviewed for this paper adamantly opposed the use of helmets, claiming that helmets discourage cycling by making it less convenient, less comfortable, and less fashionable.

They also mention the possibility that helmets would make cycling more dangerous by giving cyclists a false sense of safety and thus encouraging riskier riding behavior. At the same time, helmets might reduce the consideration motorists give cyclists, since they might seem less vulnerable if wearing helmets (Walker, 2007).

German and Danish cycling planners seem far more supportive of increased helmet use, especially among children (Andersen, 2005; Boehme, 2005; City of Muenster, 2004; German Federal Ministry of Transport, 2002; Danish Ministry of Transport, 2000). There have been extensive promotional campaigns in these two countries to encourage more helmet use, but there are no laws requiring helmet use, not even for young children. In 2002, 33% of German children aged 6-10 years wore helmets while cycling, compared to 9% of adolescents aged 11- 16, and 2% of Germans aged 17 or older. In 2006, 66% of Danish school children aged 6-10 wore helmets, compared to 12% among school children 11 years or older, and less than 5% among adults.”

See attached file for full document.

Best regards

Sebastian