

Bike accidents open door to paths

Wendy Frew Urban Affairs Editor
November 24, 2008
Sydney Morning Herald

THEY call it the "door zone". It is the few metres between parked cars and moving traffic and it is the most dangerous place for a cyclist to ride because of the risk someone will open a car door.

Statistics show accidents with doors are responsible for 41 per cent of cyclist injuries in the central business district and 18 per cent in the rest of the city.

It is one of the main reasons why more people do not ride their bikes to work in this city, says the City of Sydney council. It wants the Federal Government to help fund 245 kilometres of integrated bike paths in and around Sydney.

In collaboration with 15 inner-city councils, City of Sydney has asked the Government for \$295 million to build the network, which would use existing roads and bike paths as well as building new paths that would separate cyclists from traffic.

The network would include North Sydney's proposed elevated cycle path from Falcon Street to the Harbour Bridge and a five-kilometre cycle path from the Cooks River, Earlwood, to Iron Cove at Leichhardt.

The Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, said the cycle routes had been worked out in collaboration with the Department of Environment and Climate Change and the Roads and Traffic Authority.

"We have not yet been able to assess the full level of economic benefits from such a network," Cr Moore said.

But one estimate, based on Sydney's Anzac Bridge, showed that by diverting 10 per cent of car occupants to bicycles - or about 730 cyclists an hour - the life of the current bridge would be extended by about eight years, a saving of \$46 million based on present-day construction costs, she said.

Elaena Gardener is one of a small but growing number of bicycle commuters who would benefit from a network of dedicated cycle paths stretching from Lane Cove in the city's north, Randwick in the east, south to Rockdale and west to Ashfield.

When one driver opened his parked car's door onto morning traffic in Redfern two years ago the point of his door pierced Ms Gardener's shoulder and threw her into the traffic.

She needed internal and external stitches to repair her injured shoulder, and it was six months before she felt mentally strong enough to ride her bike to work.

"It happened so easily and so quickly," said Ms Gardener, who was riding in the door zone when the accident happened.

"I feel really sorry for the guy who hit me because he was on his way to a funeral," she said, adding that she was also distracted and had not noticed him sitting in his car.

"It is really important for drivers to understand why cyclists ride in lanes ... [Door accidents] can be deadly."

City of Sydney research shows only 1 per cent or 2 per cent of people are prepared to "mingle with the traffic" and ride in shoulder lanes. Everyone else is worried about the risk of car doors opening on them.