

Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group (the 'PortBUG').



"The Port BUG"

1st August, 2021.

PortBUG Response to a Petition From the Semaphore Mainstreet Association for the Permanent Closure of Semaphore Road's Dedicated Bike Paths.

Preface: Following notification on July 12th by a BUG member of the Semaphore Mainstreet Association's (SMA's) petition¹ for the permanent closure of Semaphore Road's off-road Bike Paths, the PortBUG has prepared the following position statement & commentary outlining:

- the actual status of the Semaphore Road Bike Paths
- their function & value in the overall PA/E Bike Network
- some of the issues raised by the SMA proposal &...
- the likely consequences of permanent closure of the Bike Paths.

We understand that at the Council meeting on 13th July (at which the petition was tabled), Councillors called for a report from professional staff which we presume may be provided at the August or September Council meeting. We trust that the *key points* made in this position statement & commentary might be reflected in this report to Council.



Statement Summary: The SMA's petition was submitted on behalf of Semaphore Road traders 'impacted by the Footpath Bike Lane' & requests 'its permanent closure by Council'. While the SMA's request is clearly stated, the petition *does not* make clear it's agenda – what outcomes it is seeking for either traders &/or the community.

The petition *does* offer some *inferred justification* for the request via the following:

- unverified reports of dangerous bike-path related incidents & cyclist behaviours
- unreferenced (& we believe *misinformed*) statements regarding the role & function of the bikepaths
- a number of comments which discount the value of the Bike Paths to the community
- an unreferenced report of 'incredibly positive' feedback from traders following closure of the Bike Paths for 'activation' events in January & February.

However it makes no attempt to objectively balance specific 'advantages for trader's' with 'consequences for the community' & it seems uncertain whether it is pursuing closure of the Bike Paths *in the public interest* ('safety') or the *commercial interests & aspirations of traders* ('business') - or both!

Analysis of the list of petitioners suggests their interests in the closure are likely to be quite varied. 'Active travel' on Semaphore Road – which includes bicycle use as well as walking, disability transport etc – presents a relatively complex picture. It's therefore axiomatic that resolution of perceived problems will require a similar level of understanding & analysis. The petitions apparent reliance on simplistic, misinformed & 'reactive' reasoning makes a constructive response challenging!

The petition's *indirectly stated* agenda appears to be *permanent & free access for traders* to the pavement currently occupied by the Bike Paths **at the expense of public space & utility**. We would point to the *significant impact on public interests* involved which we'd expect will effect both residents and visitors. We'd suggest this impact deserves acknowledgement by traders if only to avoid the appearance of excessive self-interest & to preserve positive community standing!

The PortBUG endorsed the original design & construction of the Bike Paths as part of the complete redesign of Semaphore Road-East (between Causeway & Military Roads) over a decade ago. While we are not uncritical of the now 10-year old design, *we strongly support the retention of the paths & their further development* as an integral part of Semaphore's 'Main Street' & the PA/E Bike Network.

Ten years on we would suggest that to propose the arbitrary & complete removal of the Bike Paths is a reactive (& perhaps an 'opportunistic') step & overlooks both consideration of the community interests

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involved as well as a range of *alternative strategies* which may well meet trader's commercial objectives. We would point out that the Bike Paths are clearly in regular use by the community & thus likely to be valued by both residents & visitors! In the normal course of Council's 'asset management' we would expect to see processes of review, consultation & evaluation *rather than arbitrary closure* – especially when essential transport infrastructure is only 12 years old!

An informal meeting has been called to identify "...an option that will suit all parties" and "give everyone a chance to hear the opinions of each person". PortBUG is happy to engage with such an exchange & with Council's decision-making processes but we are reluctant to embark on any 'negotiation' process *in the absence* of public consultation and recommendations from Council's professional staff. Considerable clarification is required regarding the veracity of the SMA petition's statements, the role & function of the Bike Paths, their value to the community, options for improving the design of the Bike Paths & a similar canvassing of alternative options that may well meet the SMA's goals! We believe that resolution of perceived problems & appropriate solutions is *best led* by Council's professional staff & an appropriate review & consultation processes.

The PortBUG is committed to a factual appraisal of the Semaphore Road Bike Paths & of whatever possibilities or options exist for improving them & ensuring positive outcomes for all! We trust that the Key Points we make below might be incorporated into Council's report.

Key Points: PortBUG's Position on Proposals for the Semaphore Road Bike Paths:

1. Clarifying the Proposal's Agenda: On the afternoon prior to July's Council meeting we spoke briefly with the Secretary of the SMA. We sought further clarification of the petition but were left with little clarity about the outcomes anticipated. The SMA were at pains to emphasise concerns with:

- pedestrian/bike collisions
- dangerous & threatening behaviours by bicycle users &...
- inconvenience to traders.

No evidence has been offered for these concerns & subsequent enquiries to Council indicated *no record or reports* of cycling-related accidents, pedestrian injuries, dangerous or threatening behaviours or complaints by traders of inconvenience associated with the BikePaths! We conclude that the concerns expressed by the SMA's petition are (at best) *unverified & essentially hearsay* – hardly a sound basis for depriving a community of valuable transport & safety infrastructure!

We note that the petition *does* place considerable emphasis on an enthusiastic traders response to temporary Bike Path 'activation' closures over 2021:

"The feedback from our traders was incredibly positive, with the closure impacting cafes and retail shops alike, making it easier for them to come out onto the footpath to sell their wares or increase seating... Several traders approached us about the permanent Footpath Bike Lane Closure after the activation closes this summer, and every single trader we approached fully supported the closure."

Clearly a number of traders have responded positively to Council-sponsored retail activations & now have a more permanent arrangement in mind! *We would suggest that gaining an objective understanding of the petitioner's evidence & agenda will be important for Councillors if they are to make a decision based on actual problems & the best interests of the community.*

2. PortBUG's Position: The Semaphore Road Bike Paths remain an *essential provision* for more vulnerable (and 'safety conscious') bicycle users who cannot safely contend with hazards associated with Semaphore Road's:

- 50km/h traffic speeds
- busy intersections
- many commercial driveways & delivery activities
- angle parking & reversing vehicles.

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We acknowledge the value in enhancing & sustaining economic activity on Semaphore's Main Street - particularly in current constrained circumstances - *but suggest that the permanent closure of the Bike Paths is not an appropriate way to achieve this!*

3. Costs & Benefits: The proposed permanent closure of the Bike Paths cannot occur without *real & immediate economic & social costs* & the likelihood of *future opportunity costs*:

- it will deprive many in the community of valuable access to Semaphore Road's shopping & services
- it would arbitrarily remove essential linkages from the Local Area Bike Network² (and the Port's overall 'Active Travel')
- it represents an alienation of public space – a move which surely deserves public consultation!
- research³ suggests closure of the Bike Paths would likely to have a *negative* impact on current & future retail activity, community health outcomes, traffic safety & environmental values &...
- perhaps most importantly, closures are likely to lead to significant *opportunity-costs* that will become obvious as interest in (& reliance on) bicycle use & Active Travel continues to grow!

4. A Developmental & Sustainable Business Framework: We would suggest that further development of retail & business activity on Semaphore Road *cannot* be separated from local transport & consumer access issues, nor can it be divorced from need for positive relationships between commerce & the community. Sustainable business activity needs to be fostered within a truly supportive, longer-term 'design framework' that balances business & community interests & is consistent with community needs & values. It cannot proceed sustainably if it relies only on short-term, reactive & self-interested commercial agendas!

The evidence clearly tells us that a longer-term, sustainable vision for 'mainstreet business' *must* include the provision of safe, secure & functional bicycle access³. We'd strongly suggest that any proposal for the closure (permanent or otherwise) of the Semaphore Road Bike Paths requires:

- careful review of the original intentions underlying their design & construction
- consideration of possibilities for improvement (as part of the new PA/E Walking & Cycling Plan)
- effective community consultation, particularly with those for whom the Bike Paths were designed
- a full report to Council of the likely *economic & health consequences & opportunity-costs* involved.

5. Some Possible Options for Improved Trading & Consumer Access Environment: PortBUG can see merit in asking how the Mainstreet can be further developed to improve outcomes for both business & community, while also protecting secure access for bike users & assuring the Main Street's continued role in the PA/E Bike Network. It certainly appears timely to review the best use & design of our Main Street infrastructure & whatever further development & access possibilities might be available.

Some strategies we'd suggest be considered *as more appropriate, considered & potentially beneficial alternatives* to the arbitrary closure of the BikePaths include:

- a *more frequent* program of periodic temporary closures of the Mainstreet for all traffic (including the Bike Paths) for 'market days' & related events. Such a strategy could occur several times a year on a regular (perhaps monthly) basis & may 'work' for both traders & community *simply because the events are large-scale, relatively frequent & repeated*.
- careful review of possibilities for building a stronger visual profile for the Bike Paths with:
 - simple location-specific linear structures
 - strategically placed & more prominent pavement markings
 - various bike-themed installations &... additional plantation-based strategies
- finding ways to offer *more equitable* 'outside trading' options for business owners *along the complete length* of the Mainstreet. The bike lanes proposed for closure extend only half way towards the beach, with footpaths in the western section of Semaphore Road (Military Rd to the Esplanade) becoming very narrow & congested, making bike & other wheeled access difficult). A more equitable business support strategy appears desirable rather than one responding only to the perceived advantage & opportunity of a *select group of traders!*

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- making better use of the considerable 'vacant' space in the current street lay-out, including the large pavement protuberances that appear poorly utilised & could offer extra seating, retail or advertising space (as well as options for extra 'eyes on the street' for enhanced security)
- enhancing shade & greenery which remain limited along much of the road. Ten years on it seems timely to review this, especially towards the eastern end (including residential frontages). In many 'separated pathway' designs, plantation reserves or raised beds & shade trees have proved valuable in helping pedestrians differentiate between footpaths & bikeways
- making the Bike Paths *two-way on each side*. This may render them more functional, reduce confusion or unexpected interactions, & help distinguish them from footpaths for pedestrians.

6. Are the Bike Paths Redundant? The petition suggests that the Bike Paths are redundant given the existence of on-road bike lanes. It refers to the Semaphore Road Bike Paths as 'Footpath Bike Lanes' & infers that their role & function can be replaced by use of the on-road bike lanes;

"Bike riders would remain well supported with an on-road bike lane that runs the length of semaphore road".

This statement represents a significant misunderstanding & misrepresentation of their history & the specific roles played by the bike paths & bike lanes. It has also subsequently been suggested that the bike paths can also now be replaced by 'footpath cycling'!

By virtue of their *separate & distinct definition in the Road Traffic Act (RTA)*⁴, all three of Semaphore Road's cycling environments - footpaths, bike paths & the roadway - *are legally & functionally different!* The bike lanes & bike paths were *installed concurrently* in the original Semaphore Road redevelopment & for good reason! On-road bike-lane cycling is quite distinct from use of the Bike Path, exposing bicycle users to a range of hazards *that many cannot safely & should not contend with or prefer to avoid*. This is why the need for bike paths *as well as bike lanes* was recognised when the Main Street was redeveloped!

When footpath cycling was introduced in SA in 2015 it also had a specific purpose⁵ – it recognised that cyclists are *vulnerable road users* and may often need to *leave the roadway* (whether there is a bike-lane or not) due to obstructions, lack of secure road space & other hazards. The Cycling Laws state that:

*"People are more likely to ride on the footpath where the road is considered unsafe or inconvenient (one-way streets for example) rather than for the entire trip."*⁵

The legalisation of footpath cycling was *not* designed to replace use of a Bike Path or a Bike Lane! It was clearly understood that joining the footpath was – for most bicycle users – likely to be a short-term strategy *to avoid road hazards*.

Footpath cycling is also subject to a definite hierarchy of responsibilities & set of rules under the RTA⁴ & cannot be regarded as providing the 'direct' connectivity or continuity that Bike Paths offer. The specific legal status of Bike Paths is clearly gazetted in the RTA⁴ *'for the exclusive use of bicycle users'*. This means they are likely to be free of the inefficiencies & hazards associated with pedestrian and motor vehicle interactions & thus ideal for users unable or not wanting to contend with such conditions. Bikes on the footpath can complement *but do not replace* Bike Path cycling!

When the Semaphore Road Bike Paths were planned they were seen as an essential component of the road's transport functioning & as *complementing*:

- the newly widened & greatly improved 'boulevard' footpaths
- the creation of on-road bike lanes &...
- the restriction of motor traffic to slower, single-lane roadways.

The Bike Paths were created as an integral component in what was designed as a *slower-speed, more accessible, business & people-friendly Main-Street environment*.

It's worth noting that *enhanced business outcomes* were also a key issue in the design acknowledging the wealth of research³ indicating that bike-friendly environments mean better outcomes for retail activity &

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service industries. Arbitrarily removal of the Bike Paths would remove a key design element of the roadway's design. Ten years on it is to be expected that accrued experience will suggest need to review the design & improve on it but this *does not mean the Bike Paths are redundant or should be arbitrarily closed*.

7. Bike Paths – Designed for Whom? The petition fails to acknowledge ongoing difficulties for cyclists associated with Semaphore Road's angle-parking, intersections & increasingly heavy traffic, & the intended role of the Bike Paths in countering these hazards for a specific group in the community. The petition asserts that:

"...the Council implemented the Footpath Bike Lane to encourage families to ride together, but traders have noted over several years that very few families use the path'.

This statement misrepresents the Council's purpose in designing & building the Semaphore Road Bike Paths. They were designed to *encourage people* to ride their bikes to Semaphore Road & beyond. Specifically the Bike Paths were targeted at those residents *who do not feel comfortable* sharing the road with motor traffic. This includes the 'interested but concerned'⁶ residents (approximately 60%) who are interested in using their bikes for everyday transport, but do not simply because they remain concerned for their own safety & that of their children!

Some of these people may certainly be 'family' - children, parents & grandparents - but *all* will be people who need connected & continuous bicycle routes & are unable to use (or feel unsafe using) on-road bike-lanes or the roadway. The observation that '*very few families use the path*' is irrelevant & - in our own experience - quite untrue!



8. Network Connections & Closures: The petition fails to understand & acknowledge the essential connective role that the Semaphore Road Bike Paths play *within the PA/E Bike Network*, linking local shopping, service & recreational centres (Semaphore Road, the Coast Park & the Port Waterfront & CBD) to surrounding residential suburbs. The Bike Paths provide direct & secure connections:

- between Semaphore & the Coastal Path to the Glanville Rail Station & the Port CBD
- to the Causeway Road Bikeway, the Inner Harbour Loop Path & the Outer Harbor Greenway
- for students attending local schools.

The Semaphore Road Bike Paths were built a decade ago *following extensive public consultation* & their permanent closure without a similar level of consultation would *arbitrarily remove* an essential component of the Bike Network & the secure connections they provide, discounting substantial previous Council consultations & investment, & in all likelihood severely damaging public goodwill!

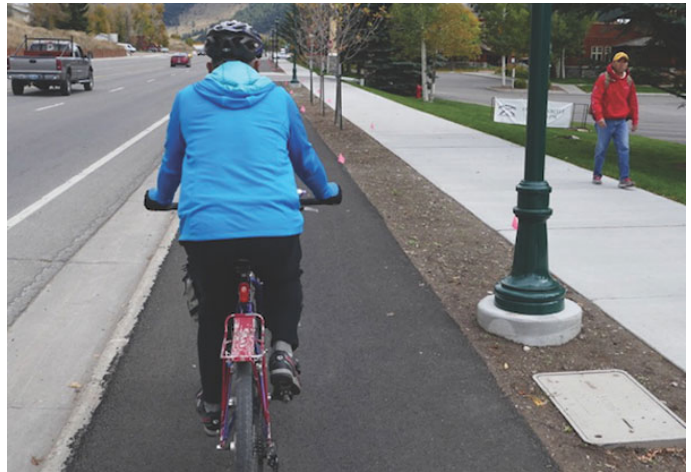
Indeed it has been noted by BUG members that the general public should be afforded the courtesy of notification of future Bike Path closures. They report it has been disconcerting to find the Semaphore Road bike path closed in the past (for 'activation events') without prior public notification.

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9. Bike Paths Not Obvious to Pedestrians? The petition mentions that pedestrians often appear 'unaware of the Footpath Bike Lane' or that they are walking on a dedicated bikeway. The Bike Paths are indeed gazetted for the 'exclusive use of bicycle users' & are signposted & marked at each block. It is of course reasonable to expect that the design & construction of a bike path will reflect its 'exclusive use' role & ensure it can be distinguished from the foot path! If pedestrians do not understand this or cannot easily distinguish the Bike Paths from the adjacent footpaths, there is clearly a need for *more effective* information &/or redesign of the bike paths by Council *rather than their closure!*

We have suggested a number of further treatments that may assist distinction between bike path & footpath, including:

- use of large on-path graphics indicating the bike-path route (or similar pavement art-work)
- similar pavement treatment *for the footpaths!*
- installation of 'sight-line' linear separations (such as used on the Frome Road bikeway in the Adelaide CBD), including varied use of planter boxes, interpretive sculpture, lighting, outdoor furniture, or plantations that signal the separation between footpath & bikeway
- introduction of grade-separation (different levels) between footpath & Bike Path pavements *combined with other 'separation' treatments*



10. Bike-Lane & Bike Path Use by Children:
In considering the complementary roles of Semaphore Road's Bike Paths & Bike Lanes it's important to acknowledge the needs of children & students. We'd simply note that child development guidelines suggest that on-road cycling (whether there are bike lanes or otherwise) is *unsuitable for independent use* by children under 12 yoa.⁷ Permitting children's use of on-road bike lanes or the road-way should remain a personal choice for parents, but appropriate alternatives such as bike paths *always need to be provided* on 'childrens' routes' & certainly in a Main Street environment!

Footpaths can certainly be shared by *all* active travel users, but as we have mentioned above, a definite 'hierarchy of use' & related rules apply that makes footpath use a *quite distinct* cycling task from use of the Bike Path. Footpath cycling simply cannot (in either legal or functional terms) be assumed to replace Bike Path use, especially if the developmental goal is to *encourage children's understanding & use of local bike networks!*



Walking & cycling is good for the high street

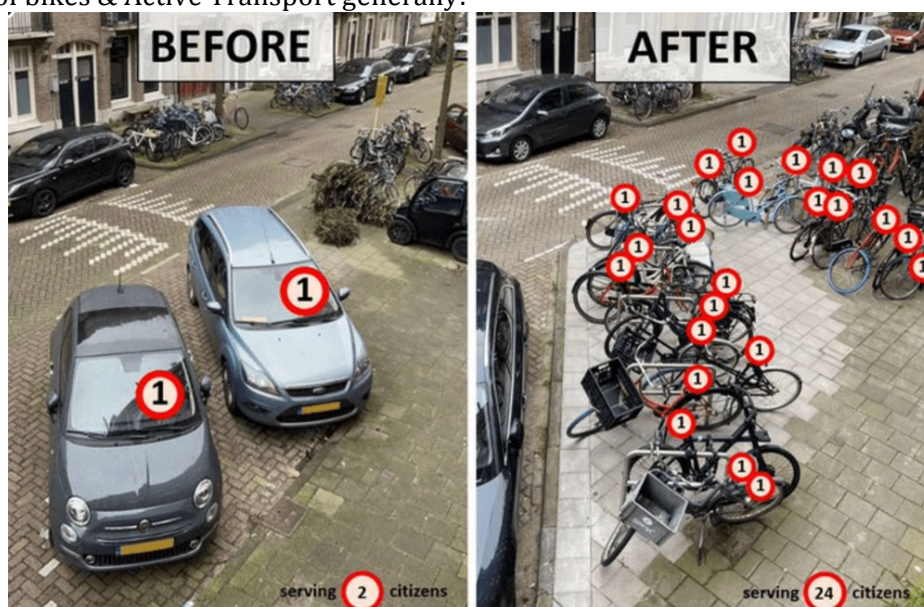
People walking and cycling visit high streets more frequently and spend more money there compared to people in cars

High streets that are nice places to walk, cycle and spend time in attract more shops, making the high street more economically viable and vibrant

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11. Main Street Benefits & Potentials: The Semaphore Road Bike Paths remain an essential element in the PA/E Bike Network, providing a range of benefits to the community that *includes* potential for increased economic activity. Semaphore Road is the Lefevre Peninsula's 'main street' and studies from Transport for London³ & elsewhere make it clear that constructing 'bike friendly' main streets directly *stimulates retail activity* while also offering a number of indirect advantages (such as reducing employee absences & property expenses, & encouraging a wider variety of retail activity & visitation).

We note that despite the move to angle-parking on Semaphore Road, finding a car park remains a frequently mentioned complaint of shoppers & visitors. It is important to remember that *every bicycle represents 'One Less Car'* & more bike use *leads directly* to less congested roadways, less competition for parking, more convenient shopping & visitation and will generally make Semaphore Road more attractive for visitors! People change their transport choices when they can *see* obvious alternatives demonstrated by others. The Semaphore Road Bike Paths are (or could be) the *highly visible cycling infrastructure* that required for *growing the use* of bikes & Active Transport generally!



It's also important to remember that there is no direct link between levels of car use & retail activity - a cyclist's money is just as valuable as a car drivers and there are many benefits³ that accrue from encouraging customers to arrive by bike. *It makes sense both economically & socially to ensure that Semaphore Road is as 'bike friendly' as possible.*

12. Risking Permanent Bans – Bikes and Outdoor Dining? Those proposing the closure maintain that they do not want to 'rid Semaphore Road' of bicycle users *nor deny* the economic benefits & social activity they bring. Unfortunately, closure of the bike paths *may achieve one or both these outcomes!*

For those areas immediately adjacent to retail frontages, any increase in 'on-path' retail & dining activities *combined with* the closure of the Bike Paths will inevitably lead to conflicting use of the footpath space, the possible identification of OH&S issues & then involvement by SafeWork SA.

If SafeWork SA became involved, such footpath-space conflicts could lead to two outcomes:

- a *ban* on bicycle use on the footpaths adjacent to the retail frontages concerned, this being the scenario that played out on the Coast Park shared-use pathway adjacent to The Palais at Semaphore.
- a *ban* on further expansion of retail & business activities into established public space!

Either of these outcomes is a potential reality. The only reason cycling was banned on the Coast Park shared-use path adjacent to The Palais (rather than outdoor drinking & dining), appears to be due to the already well-established Palais Function Deck on the opposite side of the bikeway! OH&S issues arising between cyclists & business staff or customers on Semaphore Road's footpaths - where the Bike Paths have been well

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established for over a decade - could easily see a judgement *against the expansion of business activities* instead!

For many (including children & students, families, the aged & disabled) inviting the involvement of SafeWork SA *could effectively deny safe bicycle access to Semaphore Road* & is an outcome to be avoided at all costs! It could likewise end up *severely compromising* all outdoor dining & retail activities on Semaphore Road if closure of the Bike Paths goes ahead & bicycle users elect to use the footpaths instead.

13. Environmental & Health Outcomes: The Semaphore Road Bike Paths are almost unique in South Australia & indeed across Australia, being co-located with footpath & roadway facilities. Together they provide all residents with practical & appropriate Active Transport options & more personally & environmentally responsible transport choices.

We note that about 29% of Greenhouse Gas Emissions stem from transport⁸. Construction of the Bike Paths 10 years ago indicated commitments by both the PA/E Council and the Semaphore Community to positive environmental outcomes. It also confirmed the role of transport choices in supporting Council's environmental goals via practical demonstration of 'transport alternatives' in the Main Street environment.

The PortBUG believes it would be a retrograde step & a blow to PA/E Councils' standing on environmental matters to remove the Bike Paths, especially at a time when both Government & Community need to maintain a strong focus on growing capacity for sustainable & 'lower impact' living!

Final Word: In considering the potential outcomes of the SMA proposal it is important to recognise the positive roles & contributions of Active Travel across nearly all of Council's areas of responsibility including personal & environmental health, youth, disability & the aged, economic development, tourism & transport policy. Closure of the Semaphore Road Bike Paths would have an immediate impact on Council's environmental credibility & its relationship with the PA/E & broader community. There are significant economic, health & environmental consequences & a wide range of opportunity-costs to be considered. PortBUG hopes this position statement & commentary provides further insight into some of the complexities Council Staff & Elected Members may need to consider in responding appropriately to the SMA's proposal.

Yours sincerely,



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Secretary, Port Adelaide Bicycle User Group.



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References:

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On the Bike Paths: Madeline – Semaphore Road's Postie.