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Disciplining the deviant traveller: A Foucauldian critique of cycleways

Jennifer Bonham¹ and Peter Cox²

¹ Department of Geographical and Environmental Studies, University of Adelaide

² Department of Social and Communication Studies, University of Chester, UK

Jennifer Bonham

Department of Geographical and Environmental Studies

University of Adelaide

Ph 08 8303 4655

jennifer.bonham@adelaide.edu.au

Abstract

The relationship between the cyclist and the use of roadways and other spaces allocated for travel has a contested history. Pro-cycling advocates have argued from a number of positions for the rights of cyclists to use road space and the location of responsibility for road safety.

This paper examines how the widespread introduction of segregated cycle facilities in recent years, whilst having undoubted beneficial effects, can also be seen to raise significant problems for cycling in the context of broader travel behaviours. Bonham's (2006) exploration of the manner in which travel systems and patterns act as disciplinary regimes can be extended to further develop an understanding of the impact of segregated cycle facilities.

By applying a Foucauldian approach, one can investigate the cycle path as a means by which the cyclist can be disciplined, restrained and constructed as a deviant requiring specific and special treatment. By regulating cycling behaviours within a constricted realm, this deviant behaviour can therefore be subject to surveillance and controlled. The authors argue that the consequences of these disciplinary regimes may be profoundly at odds with the promise and potential marketing of cycling as an essential component of sustainable mobility.