



## CTC – the UK’s national cyclists’ organisation

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### **Government report identifies flaws in pro-helmet evidence but reaches equally flawed conclusions**

CTC – the UK’s national cyclists’ organisation has accused the authors of a new report to the government on cycle helmets of double standards. The authors have correctly identified the shortcomings in previous research into the effectiveness of cycle helmets, but have then overlooked equally serious failings in their own work. They have also failed to discuss the adverse effects of telling cyclists to wear helmets, such as deterring people from taking up cycling, and the many ways in which helmet wearing might actually increase the likelihood of cyclists being involved in collisions in the first place.

The report finds that it is “impossible to definitively quantify the effectiveness or otherwise of cycle helmets based on the literature reviewed.” However, it then concludes that cycle helmets “should be effective at reducing the risk of head injury” and predicts that between 10-16% of the 113 fatalities they analysed could have been prevented through wearing a helmet.

CTC Campaigns and Policy Director Roger Geffen said: “After shooting down everyone else’s assumptions on cycle helmets, the report’s authors realised this left them without a pro-helmet conclusion, so they have cooked up some spurious assumptions of their own. CTC would just like to see an honest analysis of the case for and against telling cyclists to wear helmets which takes into account all the relevant issues.”

The report assumes, without any basis, that the wearing of a cycle helmet would prevent 50% of head injuries following a fall and 10% to 30% sustained in a collision with a vehicle, but then comments that “there was no specific evidence to support these estimates”.

It also fails to consider whether the wearing of helmets makes cyclists more likely to be involved in a crash: there is evidence indicating that some cyclists ride less cautiously when wearing helmets, and that drivers leave less space when overtaking cyclists with helmets on. The pressure to wear helmets also tends to reduce cycle use and causes a reduction in the ‘Safety in Numbers’ effect for other cyclists.

Furthermore, it also fails to weigh up the costs and benefits of encouraging or enforcing the wearing of cycle helmets and does not compare the cost effectiveness of alternative strategies to improve cyclists’ safety. To remedy this defect, CTC has used the World Health Organisation’s ‘Health Economic Assessment Tool’ to estimate the effect of imposing a helmet law on cyclists. This shows that helmet compulsion could result in a net increase in 253 premature deaths annually – 265 extra deaths due to the lost health benefits from people not cycling, against a saving of just 12 lives for those who continue cycling. Making cyclists wear helmets is therefore not a cost effective way to save lives; the overall costs of a helmet law would be between £305m and £415m. This estimate closely matches risk researcher Piet de Jong’s figure of \$400m published earlier this year. CTC would rather the government spent the money on lowering speed limits to 20mph, creating safer road and traffic conditions, and providing good cycle training.

Other issues not considered in the report include:

- the risks of cycling compared with other activities such as car travel, crossing the road or walking downstairs, and whether cycling deserves to be singled out as an activity which requires helmet use. You are about as unlikely to be killed in a mile of cycling as a mile of walking. Pedestrians are actually more likely to suffer head injuries than cyclists.
- how helmet laws or promotional campaigns compare with other measures to improve cyclists' safety. For instance, the British Medical Journal published evidence last week that 20mph zones in London have reduced cycle casualties by 17% and fatal and serious cycle casualties by 38%. Moreover, these and other solutions have additional benefits for other road users and encourage more walking and cycling overall.

CTC believes it should be up to the cyclist to make an informed choice about whether or not to wear a helmet and is opposed to a law making it compulsory. Laws in other countries that force cyclists to wear helmets just reduce the numbers of people who cycle. All evidence CTC has seen shows a 'Safety in Numbers' effect – so the more cyclists there are, the safer it is for everyone. The health benefits of cycling outweigh the risks of injury in a road crash by 20:1, so CTC believes it is important not to put anyone off cycling and that the government should be doing more to actively encourage cycling as a green and healthy way to travel.

## Ends

**For more information or more photos call CTC's Press Office on 0844 736 8453 or 07786 320713.**

Notes to editors:

- [CTC's view on helmets](#)
- [More detail on CTC's view on the TRL report.](#)
- 'The potential for cycle helmets to prevent injury' and 'Collisions involving pedal cyclists on Britain's roads: establishing the causes' are published by the [Transport Research Laboratory](#).
- [Piet de Jong's analysis of the potential costs and benefits of helmet laws](#). De Jong uses a mathematical model to show that the health costs of helmet laws – due to their deterrent effect on cycle use and the associated loss of physical activity – are almost bound to far outweigh any possible reductions in head injury costs thanks to helmet-wearing. He then estimates that the effect of helmet laws in Britain would be \$400m.
- CTC - the UK's national cyclists' organisation, with 70,000 members and affiliates in 250 clubs across the UK, is the oldest and largest cycling body in the UK, established in 1878. We provide a comprehensive range of services, advice, events, and protection for our members and work to promote cycling by raising public and political awareness of its health, social and environmental benefits. For more information see [www.ctc.org.uk](http://www.ctc.org.uk).