



## BRIEF PROPOSAL

IMPLEMENTING THE 'DUTCH REACH' METHOD INTO STATE ROAD RULE  
AND DRIVER TRAINING MATERIALS





## Introduction

One of the most serious crash risks for a person riding a bike is colliding with a car door being opened in their path. This crash scenario, commonly referred to as 'dooring', is one of the most common types of collision both in Australia<sup>1</sup> and internationally<sup>2</sup>, and is almost entirely due to a lack of foresight by the person exiting their vehicle<sup>3</sup>.

In situations where people ride parallel with parked cars (image above), the person riding their bike is at the mercy of the driver exiting the vehicle. The impact is instantaneous and occurs without warning. It is therefore unsurprising that 80 per cent of riders feared being 'doored'<sup>4</sup>, and that people perceive bike lanes parallel to on-street parking as unsafe and less appealing<sup>5</sup>.

There are steps we can take to reduce the risk of dooring. We are slowly redeveloping the road environment with safer bike lanes. Vehicles fitted with 'exit warning' technology will also play a pivotal role. However, these approaches will take time. The best solution will be a multi-intervention approach involving engineering, legislation, and education<sup>1</sup>. In this proposal, our organisations are recommending state traffic authorities take action by promoting the 'Dutch Reach' method in their road rule and road safety literature.

## Current road rules and education

All states and territories have road regulations that place the onus on the person driving the car to ensure open vehicle doors do not present a hazard to other road users.

*"A person must not cause a hazard to any person or vehicle by opening a door of a vehicle, leaving a door of a vehicle open, or getting off, or out of, a vehicle"*

**- Australian Road Rule 269 (3)**

With the exception of South Australia, driver training manuals and road rule handbooks also offer general cautionary advice and stipulate the legal obligation of motor vehicle occupants and provide advice to check for people riding bikes (Table 1).

We believe that the existing guidance is insufficient for preventing dooring collisions. In some cases, the current advice is simply not suitable and may be incomplete (e.g. using a side mirror). It is our view that these materials should be accompanied with clear text on the important safety behaviours that drivers should employ when exiting their vehicle.

1. Munro, C. Bicycle Rider Collisions With Car Doors. (CDM Research, Melbourne, Australia, 2012).
2. City of Toronto Works. City of Toronto Bicycle/Motor-Vehicle Collision Study., (City of Toronto Works, Toronto, Canada, 2003).
3. Lawrence, B. M., Oxley, J. A., Logan, D. B. & Stevenson, M. R. Cyclist exposure to the risk of car door collisions in mixed function activity centers: A study in Melbourne, Australia. *Traffic Injury Prevention* 19, S164-S168, doi:10.1080/15389588.2017.1380306 (2018).
4. RACV. This careless act is the biggest issue for Victorian cyclists, <<https://www.racv.com.au/royalauto/moving/cycling/bikespot-survey-results.html>> (2020).
5. Hagemester, C. & Kropp, L. The door of a parking car being opened is a risk. No kerb-side parking is the key feature for perceived safety of on-road cycling facilities. *Transportation Research Part F: Traffic Psychology and Behaviour* 66, 357-367, doi:10.1016/j.trf.2019.08.007 (2019).



**Table 1 - Current road advice across Australia's states and territories regarding opening vehicle doors**

State	Current guidance for drivers
Victoria	"Before you open your car door, use your mirrors and do a headcheck to look for cyclists and motorcyclists passing your car." - Vicroads Road to Solo Driving, p. 137
New South Wales	"You must not open your door into the path of a bicycle. Before getting out of your vehicle, check your rear view and side mirrors." - Transport for NSW Road User Handbook, p. 77
Western Australia	"After you park, you should look out for traffic, especially cyclists, and wait until it is safe before you open the door" - Drive Safe WA, p. 77
South Australia	"Before opening a car door, look behind and over your shoulder for bicycle riders... Open the door with the hand furthest from the door handle – this is known as the Dutch Reach... Look over your shoulder to see whether a bicycle rider is coming" - Government of South Australia Driver's Handbook, p. 32-33
Queensland	"Check for bicycle riders before opening your car door." - Your Keys To Driving In Queensland, p. 139
Tasmania	"When driving, look out for bicycle riders, particularly when changing lanes, entering roundabouts or opening car doors. You could seriously injure or kill a rider if you crash into them." - Tasmanian Road Rules, p. 3
Northern Territory	"When getting out of your vehicle, always check your rear view and side mirrors to avoid opening your door into a cyclist. It is an offence to cause a hazard to other road users by carelessly opening a car door or leaving it open, and could be responsible for any injury or damage caused." - Northern Territory Government Road User's Handbook, p. 33
Australian Capital Territory	"A person must not cause a hazard to any person or vehicle by opening a door of a vehicle, leaving a door open or getting off or out of a vehicle." - ACT Government Road Rules Handbook, p. 72

## What is a 'Dutch Reach'?

The "Dutch Reach" method is, quite simply, opening a car door using the hand furthest from the door. By using their left arm, Australian drivers are forced to turn their body and take a precautionary look back over their shoulder for any oncoming traffic, including people on bikes.

The method is designed for the safety of all road users, but specifically aims to reduce incidents where car doors open in the path of oncoming bike riders.

A number of countries are already making changes. The United Kingdom will update their Highway Code to promote the Dutch Reach as a safety technique<sup>6</sup>, and similar implementations have already occurred in several US states<sup>7</sup>. In Australia, the Dutch Reach method is carefully outlined, with an accompanying schematic, in South Australia's Drivers Handbook<sup>8</sup>.

It is time for the rest of Australia to catch up.



6. Munro, C. Bicycle Rider Collisions With Car Doors. (CDM Research, Melbourne, Australia, 2012).  
 7. City of Toronto Works. City of Toronto Bicycle/Motor-Vehicle Collision Study., (City of Toronto Works, Toronto, Canada, 2003).  
 8. Lawrence, B. M., Oxley, J. A., Logan, D. B. & Stevenson, M. R. Cyclist exposure to the risk of car door collisions in mixed function activity centers: A study in Melbourne, Australia. Traffic Injury Prevention 19, S164-S168, doi:10.1080/15389588.2017.1380306 (2018).

## **The way forward**

Our organisations are recommending that Victorian state road authorities commit to providing clear and consistent messaging on the Dutch Reach as a method for preventing dooring collisions. This will allow Australia to further harmonise with international policy and best practice that protects people riding bikes.

State-based road literature, such as road rule handbooks and driver training manuals, are the most suitable materials for communicating and encouraging the Dutch Reach method. Simple schematic instructions, such as those provided in this proposal, will assist in educating drivers on best practice.

This is a small but important step in taking action to reduce dooring collisions, one that will encourage long-term driver behaviour change, reduce risks, and remove perceived barriers for people riding bikes.

### **Our recommendations**

1. Update state road rule handbooks to include information on performing the Dutch Reach method when exiting a vehicle, with accompanying schematic overview
2. Update driver training manual and supplementary materials to include information on performing the Dutch Reach method when exiting a vehicle, with accompanying schematic overview