



Policy proposals

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## Background

The Bicycle Advocacy Group (BAG) is a Maltese Non-Governmental Organisation which has been advocating for and promoting cycling as a means of transportation in the Maltese islands since 2012. With traffic being an ever-present problem for the past two decades, partly due to the increasing private car ownership<sup>1</sup> and the lack of political will to prioritise sustainable mobility, cycling is very often overlooked as being part of the solution.

## Goals

The fundamental questions that we need to ask ourselves are:

- Where do we want to be in the coming years?
- Do **we want to achieve sustainable mobility** or adhere to the status quo?
- How are we going to achieve our target?

Evidence from other countries around the globe strongly suggests that the current modus operandi employed by the authorities in Malta will not only produce very short-term gains but makes the goal of achieving sustainable mobility much harder. This is why several countries are shifting from simple road-widening exercises to more holistic, environmentally-friendly solutions.

The following proposals, put forward by our members and arising from discussions and debates that BAG held with various stakeholders during the year, have been divided into three areas - Legal, Infrastructural, and Fiscal - intended to act as a framework to policy change that will promote cycling as an effective means of transportation in Malta.



[https://nso.gov.mt/en/News\\_Releases/View\\_by\\_Unit/Unit\\_B3/Environment\\_Energy\\_Transport\\_and\\_Agriculture\\_Statistics/Documents/2019/News2019\\_125.pdf](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_B3/Environment_Energy_Transport_and_Agriculture_Statistics/Documents/2019/News2019_125.pdf)



## Introduction

BAG values its members' opinions highly, given that they are the ones experiencing cycling commuting first hand in our streets. Thus, through a bottom-up exercise, BAG is able to put forward several proposals which are required to promote cycling and achieve a substantial effect on the reduction of car dependency and private car ownership.

## Legal policy

People on bicycles often feel that laws don't protect them enough and policies favour those driving their own cars rather than those making use of alternative transport. While there are several laws which cater for car drivers, whenever it comes to cyclists' rights, little is known. Therefore, although at face value the most sought after changes are infrastructural, these changes must also be backed by law.

- BAG is proposing that Government ensures that laws are in place that are necessary to actively protect cyclists, such as those which relate to presumed liability and minimum passing distance. Such legislation will provide cyclists with peace of mind on our roads.
- Malta's village cores have at times become nothing more than glorified car parks, mostly to the detriment of local residents and the village life itself. To effectively ban cars from our village cores, legislation must be updated in a way that addresses these issues and is enforceable.
- To incentivise sustainable mobility we must also discourage car use. Parking in public spaces is costing the taxpayer significant sums of money and loss of space, and parking should be offered against a cost.





## Fiscal incentives

Cycling is not only a cheaper alternative for the car user, but it also benefits society at large, both environmentally and economically. Several studies have shown that 1km of cycling saves society €0.16, while the same distance by car costs society €0.15<sup>2</sup>.

- While motorists do pay to use public space, there are no financial incentives to promote cycling, given the benefit it provides society. Since it pays to have more people cycling, paying people to cycle will result in much more savings than providing motorists with more opportunities to use their cars for every errand.
- Having a substantial part of the workforce that cycles to work does not only help in alleviating traffic, but also promotes a healthier workforce. In fact, employees who cycle to work take on average far less sick days than those who don't. <sup>3</sup> Providing shower facilities at the place of work will incentivise more employees to cycle to work, thus placing less pressure on the employer to provide parking spaces for their employees. Employers who provide, or are willing to provide such facilities can be financially subsidised by the government through grants and rebates in order to actively promote cycling to work.



<sup>2</sup> <https://www.lunduniversity.lu.se/article/watch-six-times-more-expensive-to-travel-by-car-than-by-bicycle>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.vcl.li/bilder/518.pdf>



## Infrastructure

All of the above will never succeed if the infrastructure is not in place to provide a safe space for those who want to commute by bicycle. BAG is not suggesting that every street in Malta should be equipped with segregated bicycle lanes, just as not all streets should cater for cars only, as is unfortunately the norm today.

Most importantly, this type of infrastructure should cater for the needs of its intended user. Many times cycling infrastructure is built as an afterthought with the main aim being not to hinder traffic flow, at times stopping abruptly and thus losing its intended objective to promote cycling. Here are some points suggesting how such infrastructure can meet the needs of cyclists and successfully promote sustainable mobility as a result.

- Dedicate low-traffic streets to foot- and bicycle traffic, creating safe corridors for non-motorised traffic. If these roads have residents, use electric bollards to allow access by car for residents.





- Create a bike network map (of how it should be) and start implementing measures depending on the type of road.
- Create and legislate contraflows in one-way streets. Contraflows enable cyclists to access quiet residential streets both ways while cars can only access them from one direction only.
- Provide good quality sheltered bicycle parking systems and storage facilities in strategic areas such as near tourist attractions, ports, airports and public service buildings.<sup>4</sup>
- Roadside debris needs to be cleared continuously and gutter gratings are not to be installed parallel to the direction of travel. Some cyclists end up getting injured when their wheel gets stuck in these gratings.
- Crossings should be included in strategic positions. The focus must shift from whether a crossing is hindering traffic flow to how pedestrians and cyclists are benefitting from such crossings.
- Implementation of modal filters needs to be encouraged, allowing access to pedestrians





## Conclusion

The key to enabling people to make a modal shift from using their car for every trip, even for short distances, to consider other forms of mobility, is by providing excellent quality infrastructure, appropriate to the location, as well as making these other forms of mobility convenient, feasible and cost and time efficient. When it comes to the use of bicycles, space for cycling is needed - in a small country like ours where space is so limited it is even more important to plan it well and distribute it in an equitable manner. Providing for cycling will free up space which can be used for more productive activities, and it can be reclaimed by the public.

The proposals we are putting forward arise from people who are motivated to cycle, because they realised that it is faster than being stuck in a traffic jam, they can predict journey times very accurately, and have experienced the fun and social way that travelling by bike provides, while also introducing healthy exercise into their daily routine. We thus augur that whoever reads this document recognises the rationale behind it and uses her / his role as policymaker to improve and enrich mobility in the Maltese islands.