

A vision for sustainable mobility

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Proposed by Rota





About Rota

We advocate to all those who cycle in Malta, be it parents, students, pensioners, athletes, workers, employers, commuters and children.

We push the government to deliver on their obligations towards all road users.

We propose solutions to guide their efforts so we can all have the opportunity to experience the bicycle as a viable means of getting from one place to the other.

We are part of your journey, whenever you grab your bicycle to go to the grocer, friend or the office.

Introduction

As Malta gets closer to the next general election, the time is ripe to consider proposals with a vision that can improve the quality of life and inspire the public to vote for a sustainable future. This document outlines Rota's proposals in this regard. As a means of transport cycling entails many benefits: bicycles are efficient and take up little space on the road, they are environmentally sustainable and beneficial for both the physical and mental wellbeing of the individual. Cycling can significantly contribute to achieving the much-needed health and climate action goals by promoting physical exercise among the population and reduce obesity rates and pollution levels coming from transport. Although not everyone can commute by bicycle, there is little doubt that many more people in Malta can and wish to do so.

Contrary to what is often stated, Malta is geographically well-suited for bicycles. Commuting distances average 5 km (a 15-minute bike ride) for many, and in particular target groups such as students. New cycling technology such as pedal assist electric bicycles (pedelecs) have made cycling even more attractive on the islands, flattening hills and reducing the problem of the summer heat. Rota's vision is to make cycling a feasible, and safe option, which will increase its popularity in Malta, as it is in many countries in Europe. The following 17 proposals lead to this vision becoming tangible.



Proposals

1) Commuting by bicycle

It is unclear as to the amount of commutes which are done by bicycle. Nevertheless, it can be concluded that this number is too low. Rota proposes that a new government sets an overarching target to have at least 10% of all commutes to be by bicycle within the next legislature.

2) Legally protecting bicycle users and pedestrians

Presumed Liability for motor vehicle users entails that reversal of the burden of proof on motor cyclists or car drivers, as the case may be, in the event of an accident involving a cyclist. We need to explore the possibility of creating a *juris tantum* presumption in favour of cyclists and to shift the onus of proof on the motor vehicle users. This principle is already being indirectly applied in cases involving pedestrians - a mere extension of such a notion in favour of cyclists would be a step forward in the right direction.

Introducing Presumed Liability for motor vehicle users gives cyclists a layer of legal protection. Cyclists are among the most vulnerable road users, as the threat of being hit by a motor vehicle is an ever present threat. Moreover, it is rare that cyclists directly contribute to an accident in which they have been injured.

In countries such as France, Denmark and the Netherlands and indeed the majority of EU member states, the introduction of Presumed Liability has significantly reduced collisions with bicycles and offered justice through compensation to victims of reckless driving, or their familiars in case of death.





3) Insurance cover for bicycle users

Rota proposes the introduction of government funded personal and vehicular insurance for bicycle users. While the organisation maintains the position that the acquisition of insurance should remain optional, a publicly funded option can lead to a significant uptake of insured bicycle users. Insured bicycle users should be protected against bicycle theft, third party damage, and damage to the bicycle.

4) Incentivising sustainable transport

Most traffic jams occur during commuting hours. Rota believes that one way in which the use of sustainable and more efficient means of transport can be encouraged is through fiscal incentives. Rota therefore applauds existing fiscal instruments such as grants and tax exemptions on bicycles, e-bikes, e-scooters, kick scooters and public transport, however Rota encourages the continuation and expansion of such programmes with, for example employee driven measures to provide monetary incentives (e.g. tax credits or bonuses) for those cycling to work.

These schemes are widely used abroad as part of green travel plans within organisations, some of which are strongly supported by local and national governments. Rota is proposing that the government morphs the current tax schemes into up-front grant payments rather than tax rebates. The government would not be incurring extra costs but an individual might find it easier to purchase a bike with an upfront voucher, rather than with a tax rebate.

5) Lighting and CCTV cameras to increase safety

Many popular cycle routes pass through foot bridges, alleyways and areas which are not well lit in the evenings. This is done to avoid busy roads dominated by motor vehicles. Having said this, the aforementioned areas put cyclists, pedestrians and kick scooter users at risk for their personal safety. This discourages cycling in the evenings, especially for women. Therefore, Rota proposes the installation of more artificial lighting in popular bike routes, as well as the introduction of CCTV cameras in areas which are considered more dangerous.

6) Narrower car lanes

The width of a car lane is directly proportional to the speed that a motor vehicle travels at. In short, the wider a lane, the faster a motorised vehicle is likely to move. This is often a larger determinant of speed than the official speed limit put in place. Rota recommends that lane width should directly reflect the speed limits put in place across all the road network.

This ensures greater safety for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and micromobility users. Moreover, narrower car lanes can create more space for pedestrians, cyclists and other sustainable transport users.





7) Separated sustainable infrastructure in main roads

Several arterial and distributor roads in Malta do not offer a suitable space for sustainable transport users such as pedestrians or cyclists. This is despite the fact that such roads are the only viable way a pedestrian or cyclist can get from one place to another in the most direct way possible.

Rota proposes a bicycle network, created to cater for sustainable road users, that connects locations of interest to each other and provide a safe route throughout the islands. This includes segregated infrastructure where necessary. On many occasions, road widening is not needed, with redistribution of space being enough. Lane narrowing and other smart initiatives can be introduced to cater for both car users and sustainable transport users.

8) Better and more regular bike racks

The installation of secure and covered bike racks in strategic areas around the residential and commercial areas would allow residents and visitors to park their bicycle safely overnight or for extended periods of time. The availability of bicycle racks at various employment nodes could form part of green transport plans which employers can adopt and implement. Secure, on-street bicycle racks/storage in high density urban areas would encourage bicycle ownership among those living in flats with, potentially, less space to store bicycles inside.

Sheffield Bicycle racks should always be installed, in favour of any other options, as these have been proved to be the most effective bicycle locking structure. The adoption of high quality standards of what constitutes a suitable bike rack or bike storage system is imperative and can be provided by Rota.

9) The adoption of suitable design standards

The Maltese authorities responsible for the delivery of high quality road infrastructure have still not adopted quality standards for safe and secure cycling infrastructure. Rota proposes the adoption of a national cycling policy which incorporates national design standards of safe cycling, as outlined by the European Union and the European Cyclist Federation. The CROW Design Manual for Bicycle Traffic should also be referenced for designing the suitable infrastructure.

10) Contraflow exemptions for cyclists

Rota recommends contraflow exceptions for cyclists. Contraflows are very common in mainland Europe, they improve permeability through the road network, cut down tailgating and avoid unnecessary hills, junctions and main roads. In Malta, there are already contraflow exemptions such as for buses, heavy vehicles, fishermen, sightseeing buggies, access, rendering a service, and residents (including cyclists if they happen to be residents). Contraflows allow for safer, and more direct access to the destination.





11) Respecting sustainable transport infrastructure

The quality and maintenance of sustainable transport infrastructure remains rather limited in Malta. Poor maintenance and the general lack of enforcement, many a time makes the limited available infrastructure unusable as a result of parked cars, debris or other obstacles in these areas. This is unacceptable as it often makes several routes inaccessible for many or puts the lives of cyclists and pedestrians in danger. Rota is therefore proposing stricter enforcement and harsher penalties for such actions, and regular maintenance and upkeep of cycling and pedestrian infrastructure.

12) Safer residential roads

While the use of main roads is sometimes unavoidable, cyclists almost always prefer to use side roads or residential roads. However, increasingly such roads are also becoming unsafe as a result of cars driving at fast speeds, or even blocked altogether when a new bypass is constructed and cuts across a route, without retaining the old perpendicular connections as is common practice abroad. The issue keeps repeating itself persistently, even in the latest brand-new roads. To increase the safety of residential roads, Rota recommends the following 3 measures.

Firstly, road dieting. This would not only decrease speeds, but also increase space for residents to be able to use wider and more comfortable pedestrian areas.

Secondly, prioritisation of pedestrianised areas. Smooth tarmac encourages speed, something which can be especially dangerous and unpleasurable in residential areas. Rota therefore proposes changing road surfaces to cobblestones for pedestrians and a specialized tarmac aggregate which is painted using the appropriate paint to indicate bicycle priority. Thirdly, street-level crossings or, if truly necessary, comfortable and wide underpasses or overpasses, to reconnect old roads together.

13) Use of country/rural roads

In the last few years, country/rural roads which hardly saw any car traffic have been promoted as diversionary roads. This has been done through resurfacing with smooth tarmac and also through direct promotional signs instructing drivers to make diversions. This has turned once pleasant and safe routes into dangerous ones. On many occasions, this induces new traffic and as a result some have also even been turned one-way and therefore encourage speeding, with drivers thinking only about not encountering cars any more and therefore ignore other road users. Rota proposes that country lane usage should be significantly limited for motor vehicles, allowing only residents or farmers to make use of them.

This may be achieved with several measures on both ends of a road: signage, camera-control, or fences with sensors. In some cases, such country roads may even be left fully open, placing bollards blocking just one point or one end of a road. This is called a modal filter, keeping full access everywhere to any motor vehicle, but makes it impossible to go straight through without detouring around, while it keeps people walking or cycling unaffected.

Turning some narrow country roads from one-way back to two-way can also be an option, achieving the same desired result of reducing most traffic. This makes drivers think twice from even using the road any more unless they truly need to, such as residents.

This together with other traffic-calming measures can make country roads safe again. It now makes sense to introduce such measures as many of the projects which were being done have now been completed and therefore diversions are no longer needed.

The narrow countryside roads in the areas of Ħal Millieri, Ta' Loretu / Ħas-Saptan, Wied Ġarnaw, Tal-Balal / Tal-Qasbi, and Wied is-Sewda, to name a few, are strong contenders for such pilot projects.





14) Encouraging multi-modality

Several cyclists enjoy the opportunity to travel using several sustainable means of transport, namely ferries and bicycles. However, those who wish to cycle and use the bus are often denied the opportunity to do so.

Indeed, cycling to some main bus stops and then using public transport can be a suitable way to commute for many who have their commitments slightly further away from their place of residence.

Rota proposes two measures in this regard. Firstly, the installation of Sheffield bike racks at main bus stops and stations. This would encourage commuters to use both means of transport. Secondly, some buses on main bus corridors and routes should have the ability to take a number of bicycles on board or through the installation of exterior racks.

15) More pedestrianisation

Village squares and town centres in Malta are often beautiful historic areas with much potential, particularly for small businesses and community engagement. It is therefore a shame that car dependence and lack of proper traffic management has meant that many village squares typically act as car parks or motor traffic filled roads.

Pedestrianisation and infrastructure for cycling gives greater inclusion to children and young people, people with limited mobility and elderly, providing them with more independence and accessibility, currently hindered by cars.

Rota proposes that pedestrians be given priority in these areas and whenever possible these areas should be pedestrianised. Alternative car parking can typically be offered in other areas close by. In order to ensure a smooth introduction of such measures, community policing and proper enforcement is necessary to educate drivers on new concepts such as pedestrian priority.

16) A safe cycle network

Rota encourages future projects to look at Maltese infrastructure holistically. Cycling and pedestrian infrastructure does not only need to be of a high quality in itself, but must also be connected to other safe and efficient networks.

Rota therefore recommends that all new infrastructure projects consider the connectivity of cycle ways, and pedestrian infrastructure with nearby roads, alleyways, pavements and so on. Moreover, existing infrastructure should be reviewed and improved accordingly, with a short to medium term plan for sustainable transport infrastructure upgrade.

17) Consulting civil society & citizens

Many new infrastructural projects, especially involving roads, are car centred and hostile to sustainable transport users. The relatively high rate of injury of vulnerable road users among road accident victims is testament to our current design, which favours and prioritises the car.

New infrastructure must be more inclusive and accessible to all, including pedestrians and those using micromobility.

Rota therefore emphasises that relevant authorities adhere to legislation and first go through a period of consultation before new infrastructure projects are implemented. Here stakeholders, such as local councils, NGOs and citizens are given the opportunity to comment and make suggestions as to possible improvements. An avenue must be made available in which legal action can be taken against authorities that fail to do so.



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