

Ride 2 MQ!

Places to park (your bike)

“People would never drive their cars if they couldn’t find a place to park. Why should it be any different for people who ride their bikes?” asks Adrian Emilsen, Macquarie University’s sustainable transport officer.

Macquarie University (MQ) is located in North Ryde, 15km north-west of Sydney’s CBD and within easy reach of an expanding high-tech industry corridor. One of Australia’s leading research universities, MQ has over 2,000 staff and 31,000 students — including 8,800 international students from over 100 countries.

MQ is working hard to reduce its greenhouse emissions, but (like many Australian universities), the 126 hectare campus was initially designed for easy access by car. Adrian Emilsen was appointed to the newly created sustainable transport officer position in 2009 (the same year that the long-awaited Macquarie University train station opened). One of his key roles is to promote ‘cycling to uni’.

An important way to encourage cycling is to provide more bicycle parking facilities. And while many academic staff keep their bicycles in their own offices, general staff and students need access to bike racks in convenient locations.

Make it visible

When Adrian started work at MQ, there were only a few bike racks around campus. He says he has been “quite opportunistic” in finding suitable spaces for more racks: “Historically, bicycle parking has been devalued in public spaces, so I’ve searched for possible new bicycle parking areas in highly visible spaces”.

“Bike racks serve as an invitation to cycle”, he adds. “People think: ‘oh, so other people ride their bike here!’.” What’s more, Adrian says, “nice shiny stainless steel bike racks help people feel that cycling is valued”.

Popular spots for bike parking on campus are at major junctions and near large buildings and lecture halls. “In busy locations, it’s really critical to find good separation from vehicular and pedestrian traffic”, Adrian says.

One of Adrian’s major successes was converting a building undercroft from a ‘dead space’ to an area that can now park up to 36 bicycles. Previously, this space included a poorly designed bike rack that was installed so close to the wall that U-locks couldn’t be used.

An architect's report helped support the case for new bike parking facilities (rather than a proposed café) as ideal use of this particular space.

The area is now a 'high value' space – and a highly visible one too, due to the “virtual river of people” that flows to and from the new train station each week day. This space is also quite secure because, as Adrian says, “passive surveillance is a key to bike security” — the constant flow of people serves as an informal surveillance system.

Undercover operation?

Adrian would love to make all bike parking spaces undercover, but it simply isn't viable. “You need to develop mixture of secure, convenient, and weather-protected bicycle parking facilities. Sometimes there's a tradeoff and you have to work with what's available”.

Space specs

While he may be opportunistic, Adrian's case for creating any new cycling facility is always based on careful analysis. “I'm often looking to see where bikes may be tied up to poles, trees or other objects — this helps you identify where there is unmet demand”. Another important step is to consult with building managers to make sure there are no conflicts with water and fire access, for example.

Bike hubs — a design checklist

- *Excellent water flow efficiency*
- *Excellent heating efficiency rated solar panels*
- *Lights activated by movement sensors*
- *Self cleaning showers (set for midnight?)*
- *Grey water with underground filtration*
- *Ample space for hanging clothes, drying towels*
- *Secure easy to use well positioned lockers*
- *Easy secure bike parking*

Where to shower?

Showers are important links in the provision of adequate cycling facilities. “Sometimes they are part of a 'secret society' in the workplace”, says Adrian — “if you have one in your area, you try to keep it quiet so other people don't use it!”. He discovered that existing showers on campus were in basements, on rooftops or in wheelchair accessible toilets – not at all convenient for the cyclists on campus.

One way to improve cyclists' shower facilities is to install a 'bike hub', or self contained shower/locker/parking area. After extensive testing and some modifications, two bike hubs will be open for use at MQ soon.

How far is too far?

Although he is a regular cycle commuter (who also enjoys long-distance cycle touring), Adrian recognises that “most people are comfortable with the idea of cycling around 5km

– 10km per day”, so the cycling infrastructure needs to support this. “Many people don’t even need showers if they cycle slowly and are able to ride in low-stress environments”, he says.

Breakfasts & bugs

In addition to improving facilities for cyclists, MQ has hosted Ride to Work Day breakfasts “which are getting better each year”, says Adrian. “And we now have an informal bike user group, bi-annual cycle training courses and an annual Sustainability Fair”.

Sustainability@MQ

Adrian is a member of the Sustainability@MQ unit: a team of eight people headed by Director of Sustainability, Leanne Denby. Sustainability@MQ has a long term vision for improving the sustainable transport options for staff and students, part of a strategy to reduce reliance on single passenger vehicle use.

“While we can do a lot to make it easier for cyclists when they arrive on campus”, Adrian says, “some of our biggest challenges lie in building a network of quality cycleways” that link the campus with neighbouring suburbs, shopping centres and research & technology hubs, for example.

MQ would like to see more than 5% of all staff and students cycling to University in keeping with the NSW State Government’s goal of a 5% cycling modeshare. According to Adrian, “Our last survey found that 1.5% of students and 3% of staff cycle to uni. We still have a very long way to go”.

Better bike parking

Tips from Adrian Emilsen:

- Wall mounts are not recommended for a public bike parking facility because many people believe they are difficult to use.
- Marine grade stainless steel is preferable. Poor quality powder coated pipe steel tends to pit and look shabby over time.
- Australian standards (AS2890.3) have good info on basic dimensions of bikes and different classifications of parking facilities. When people buy bike racks, they usually have no idea that there are Australian Standards for bike parking.
- Companies which follow through with bike rack installation and consider client requirements, the site itself, security and of course the Australian standards are preferable to those which only supply racks and storage facilities.
- The ‘curly’ racks are aesthetically pleasing but don’t function that well; only good for cable locks, not u-locks.
- Bike storage lockers have only one key per person; the lockers are ugly and only useful in areas with minimal security.