## Blind Citizens NZ’s Position on Cyclists on Footpaths

The 2016 Annual General Meeting sought to have Blind Citizens NZ clarify its position regarding cyclists and other wheeled or motorised vehicles that are regularly encountered on our footpaths. Currently, it is legal for vehicles below a certain wheel size, even with low-powered motors, and also motorised mobility vehicles to be used on footpaths.

Concern had arisen due to a petition having been presented to Parliament on which a committee was about to hear submissions. The petition had recommended a change to the road rules to allow children under 14, seniors over the age of 65 and people with mental and physical disabilities to cycle on the footpath.

Blind Citizens NZ’s position is quite clear. It is that no one, even young children, should be able to cycle on footpaths except where there is a designated cycle lane. Apart from our right to feel safe on the footpath, we can also argue that the benefits of being able to cycle there can often be overrated and even misleading. Some points to note are:

**1.** Footpaths should be a safe place for people who prefer to walk or have no alternative other than to do so. If footpaths were to become an unsafe environment, even simply through fear of an incident, this would affect not only the blind and vision-impaired, but also the elderly, pram-pushers, wheelchair users, the physically disabled, and those with hearing loss.

**2.** Moving a group of cyclists from the road to the footpath would just replace one set of vulnerable road users while at the same time creating another set of vulnerable pedestrians. If it is unsafe to cycle on the roads, why should it be made less safe for those on the footpath?

**3.** Mobility scooter users are warned against travelling faster than surrounding pedestrians, but cyclists can’t travel at walking speed. Furthermore, any age and speed limits that may be imposed would be impossible to enforce, or even to monitor.

**4.** The very fact that some cyclists may currently be aware that cycling on footpaths is illegal, may cause them to refrain from the practice or at least to take more care than they might if their position was sanctioned under the law.

**5.** Most road accidents involving cyclists do not involve motor vehicles. Cyclists injure themselves most often by falling off and hitting things, and there are far more things to hit on footpaths, both moving and stationary.

**6.** The very developmental factors that make child cyclists unsafe on roads such as immature motor skills, immature vision and balance, difficulty judging speed and distance; also make them unsafe on footpaths. These factors may not only make them a danger to themselves, but even more so to those they collide with.

**7.** Because there is less time to react, vehicles exiting driveways are even more of a hazard to cyclists than they are to pedestrians. Then there is the reality that, whether they’re on the road or on the footpath, cyclists still have to cross intersections, and that’s where most collisions between cyclists and motor vehicles occur.

**8.** Many footpaths in suburban areas in New Zealand are narrow and often not well maintained. Even if cyclists acknowledge that pedestrians do have the right of way, such avoidance manoeuvers may not always be successful, placing both parties at risk of injury.

**Adopted April 2017**