

Airport BUG



Brisbane Airport Bicycle User Group
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Airport Regulation Inquiry
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428,
Canberra City ACT 2601

Dear Dr Wendy Craik

Re: Suggestions for establishment of review and appeal provisions to afford natural justice to communities adversely affected by airport corporation decisions.

Airport Bicycle User Group (Airport BUG) was created in response to attempts by the Brisbane Airport Corporation (BAC) to ban all cycling on airport roads in April 2008 (notice attached). After a concerted campaign by cyclists, airport employers, Bicycle Queensland and with assistance from the Brisbane City Council mayor and health advocacy organisations including the Heart Foundation, BAC withdrew the ban and replaced it with a recommendation not to cycle on airport roads. As the many airport roads were not affected by the roadworks which were the reason for the ban, workers were again able to cycle commute to work.

Since that time Airport BUG has advocated for safe, convenient and direct bicycle access to the Brisbane Airport precinct. Airport BUG was invited and has provided input to road planning projects including the Gateway Roundabout Upgrade, Gateway Bikeway Project and Kingsford Smith Drive upgrade. Airport BUG also provided a submission to the Brisbane Airport 2009 Draft Masterplan and currently has a representative on the community liaison group for the Airport Link Road Project.

Cyclists are legitimate road users and this is recognised by state and federal legislation including the Australian Road Rules. The reason people choose to cycle to work at the Brisbane airport precinct is varied. Some have chosen to cycle to work for health and environmental reasons, some have only one car in their family (which their partner uses), some do not have a car at all and some may not have a drivers licence. In addition because public transport connections to the Brisbane Airport, do not service some areas and only operate during normal working hours, shift workers are often among the people who choose to cycle to work at the Brisbane airport.

In our submission to the 2009 Brisbane Airport Masterplan and in subsequent letters to the Minister, we identified the exemption airports have from local and state planning regulations as resulting in poor outcomes for active travel. We have also raised concerns that Airport Masterplans do not specify enough detail regarding proposed infrastructure and contain no timelines for implementation. We are pleased that recent legislative amendments go some way to addressing these concerns. However there is no requirement to retrospectively address substandard infrastructure built prior to the planning amendments.

Recently we are concerned by decisions taken by the Brisbane Airport Corporation regarding cycling on Airport Drive. Airport workers who cycle commute have been using Airport Drive to access their workplaces well before the BAC took over the management of the Brisbane airport from the Federal Airports Commission. In April 2009 the BAC issued a notice to cyclists informing that 'cycling on Airport Drive, between Charlie Earp Bridge and the International Terminal roundabout will be PROHIBITED from the date of the traffic diversion to Bridge 1 until further notice from BAC' (notice attached). The grounds for issuing the notice were that road works were a safety hazard for cyclists. The notice designated a 'cycling route during construction' which was longer and less direct and had more intersections and road narrowing than the cyclists preferred route on Airport Drive, however cyclists used the diversion in good faith expecting that once the roadwork was completed they would be able to use Airport Drive again.

In our correspondence to BAC dated 22 April 2011, Airport BUG observed that construction activities along Airport Drive were almost complete and requested that the BAC lift the prohibition on cycling on this section Airport Drive.

In response BAC invited Airport BUG members to a meeting on Thursday 21 May 2011. In this meeting BAC representatives explained that because the design of Bridge 1 constructed by BAC was not considered to be suitable for cycling, BAC would not remove the prohibition on cycling on Airport Drive. BAC representatives explained that BAC considered their obligations for cycle access were met through the diversion route prescribed during the construction.

This news was both surprising and disappointing to Airport BUG members. Airport cyclists believed that access to Airport Drive would be reinstated after completion of the roadwork. This belief was based on announcements by BAC that cycling was prohibited 'until further notice' and that the diversion route was to be designated as 'during construction work'. We believe BAC have been disingenuous in their representation of the closure of Airport Drive. We also consider BAC have not acted with appropriate concern for the community as they did not incorporate cycle friendly features into construction of their Bridge 1 when they knew it was a preferred route for cycle access to the terminals, control tower and beyond.

This issue outlined above is only one of several issues where we feel the community has not been fairly dealt with by the BAC. We believe at the root of these issues is the lack of accountability of BAC to the public for their decisions, particularly where these decisions affect communities and their use of the public assets managed by the airport authority.

The opportunities for natural justice for members of the community affected by BAC decisions are very limited. To our knowledge, the avenues of appeal are limited to the boards of Airport Corporations and the federal Minister. Considering airport corporations are obliged by their shareholders to maximise profit, their boards do not necessarily have any interest in enhancing the social, health and environmental capital of Australian communities.

Neither do the share holders have an interest in the effects of the operation of airports on Australian communities, as these shareholders are often large corporations or overseas owned. (We know this because we have on occasion written to the majority overseas shareholder of the Brisbane Airport Corporation with our concerns).

Beyond the airport board, the next avenue of appeal is to the Minister. Minister Albanese has been gracious enough in the past to entertain our concerns, however bothering the Minister every time we consider the Brisbane Airport Corporation is not complying with their social, environmental or moral obligations, is not appropriate or practical.

We propose that the Government consider establishing an independent commissioner for airports to oversee decisions made by airport authorities. The commissioner should act as an avenue of appeal for members of the community who feel they have been adversely affected by decisions made by airport authorities. The commissioner should have powers to arbitrate on matters of disagreement between airport authorities and the community.

Yours sincerely

Mitchell Bright
Convenor Airport BUG