

Free bike lockers at Brisbane stations

Inspection of both old and new bicycle storage facilities on three of the Brisbane suburban rail lines reveals an impressive system of leasing out 540 lockers at no charge to cyclists. A senior officer of Queensland Transport responsible for the lockers says there is no charge for their use because it would deter motorists from accessing stations by bicycle instead of by car. Twenty to 30% of those using bike lockers previously parked a car at the station.

With each car parking space costing an average \$8,000, what is saved by freeing up these car parking spaces for other motorists pays for the bike lockers as well. The cost saving argument is simple: the provision of bicycle lockers results in better use being made of expensive car parking facilities and provides more convenient access for rail patrons at stations where car parking cannot be provided or is very limited.

There is also an awareness that bicycle theft is a serious deterrent to bicycle access to stations. The official says if funding were available, another 1,000 lockers could be installed because the long waiting list proves there is a large demand for them. Indeed, at one station 40 people have filled in application forms for bicycle lockers but there is none available.

What makes the Queensland lockers superior for users is the easy-to-use pick-proof lock which requires a key provided to the registered locker user. What makes the lockers superior for the railways is that operations staff are happy with the locker registration system which ensures 95% locker occupancy during the working week while maintenance staff find the corrosion resistant two-part chemical paint finish minimises maintenance.

The lockers have a replaceable lock in case the key is lost or stolen and the only cost to the registered cyclist is \$50 if they lose the key to cover the cost of replacing the lock. There is no problem with making this work because the registration form signed by cyclists legally commits them to this arrangement. Every three months all locker users are required to re-register or return the locker key and this ensures that there are few empty lockers. All that station staff have to do is stick a leaflet on a locker every three months advising the cyclist to re-register. If that is not done the locker is opened with a master key and given to someone else.

LEFT: At Sandgate there are 64 bicycle lockers all of which are being used since their installation last year. There are more than 15 people on the waiting list for new lockers.

Bike/rail commuting in Brisbane

There is no accurate historical data about bicycle use on the Brisbane rail system but several thousand bicycles were parked in racks during the last war and today there is a great deal of recreational cycling done because of the provision of bicycle paths. Around 1,000 people park bicycles at the station on weekdays but no data is available about bike rail commuting over the last 20 years. Sandgate station on the Shorncliffe line is an example of a typical station.

In the fifties there used to be racks for 160 bicycles at Sandgate, most of which stored bicycles under cover, plus front wheel locking racks. By the late 1970s, very few people cycled to Sandgate station and most bicycle racks were removed to make way for car parking spaces. Since then increasing levels of bicycle theft have suppressed demand until the new bicycle lockers were installed. Today at Sandgate there are 64 bicycle lockers all of which are being used and, since their installation last year, there are more 15 people on the waiting list for new lockers. The bicycle locker installation is shown on the photograph.

Another pleasant feature of the Brisbane rail system is the cleanliness of stations which are kept free of graffiti and station environments are more friendly as a consequence. Help points allow rail patrons to alert police and rail staff on unstaffed stations (very good for dobbing in bike thieves or vandals). Another development of benefit to cyclists is a security fence around part of the station car park which is locked between 9 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. at unstaffed stations. When there are no lockers this provides a measure of protection and this idea could be used with rooms on stations or fenced off areas exclusively for cyclists.

The only hassle cyclists experience is in taking bikes on the trains and there is a lot of room for improvement here. Indeed, the rail authorities in Brisbane would be well advised to do what they do in Melbourne and allow free transport of bicycles off-peak and half-fare carriage in the peak hour. In Brisbane, whether you are allowed to put your bike on the trains depends on the whim of the station master and the guard/ticket collector on the train. Even if there is plenty of room on the train, cyclists cannot feel secure that they will be able to board the train. Cycling organisations are not happy with this at all. Free off-peak carriage of bicycles and half-fare rush-hour carriage is recommended in the just-released Brisbane Bike plan and hopefully those recommendations will be implemented.

—Alan Parker