

Australian Cyclists Party 2015 President's Report

The ACP is just over 2 years old and has now arrived at a critical juncture. We have built the foundation of a party that has proven capable of operating as an organisation with many capabilities in place and lessons learned.

Now we need to decide if we should go further, and if so, how and in which direction?

Our Successes

Over the last two years our successes have been pretty impressive by most accounts for a new political party – we have:

- Signed up over 2,000 members across every state and territory
- Registered and contested in 2 state elections and one federal by-election
- Put forward 39 candidates in total
- Created a following through Facebook that attracts thousands
- Over 1,200 followers following us on Twitter
- Delivered as required a newsletter to members with a very good opening rate
- A solid website that provides a means of ongoing interaction and information and membership sign-up
- Established a notable Reference and Advisory Panel
- Hosted a talk with Enrique Peñalosa, now again the Mayor of Bogota
- We have carefully steered a course that is free of external influence and and non-ideologically aligned.

We have also been recognised by other parties as having a voice worth listening to and been involved in discussions on policy in particular with the ALP but also the Greens and other minor parties. We have consistently been given high preferences by many parties.

Notably, the LNP has been resistant to engaging so far and their policies have largely been at odds with encouraging cycling through adequate investment. However, this too should change over time as cycling is de-coupled from being a political point scoring issue and instead seen as a practical and effective means of transport and a way to focus on its health benefits and the focus it provides on building more liveable cities. It is a solution to a number of relevant transport, planning and health issues that all parties should embrace.

Most notable to many of us have been the words of encouragement from people who see our role as an important counter-weight to others and free from constraint due to being independently run and funded. We have no hidden agendas and our approach is an informative and constructive one.

So far this has all been accomplished on a very modest budget and relying exclusively on energising volunteer effort.

Our Challenges:

- Financially – there is no choice, we must attract more funding to allow us to go on and assure us more flexibility and certainty and to end our dependence on committee member loans. Asking for members to pay a membership fee will be a critical step in this process and an untested direction that risks losing members. However, it will be informative at the least and, having already been approved by the Committee, it will be communicated to the membership following the AGM.
- Committee members – we need to increase our capability and our numbers in order to adequately cover the tasks at hand and not over-burden a few. It is clear that volunteer effort is essential but that it comes with limitations as far as commitment of time. We must work to ensure our Committee is capable of managing the day-to-day workings and needs of the ACP and can support the activities we commit to.
- Communication and Profile – we must step up our ability to communicate our existence and our aims to a broader segment of the community. With many news channels demanding payment by way of advertising, we need to define a strategy that creates better opportunities and lock onto a message that has broader appeal. Finding better ways to leverage our online engagement into volunteer must remain a high priority.
- Membership – our numbers remain steady and have now reflected our focus on NSW and Victoria. To gain momentum elsewhere we will need to develop more presence in those states and territories.
- Elections – we need either significantly improve our ability to contest elections or to decide we just won't. What we have learned is that we can't generate the numbers at the polls and are likely to be outnumbered and outspent anyway. Our ability to handle the upcoming Federal Elections needs to be assessed in that context.
- Policy – there is a need within the Committee and with our members to more clearly define the extent of our reach on non-cycling specific policies and whether we should embrace topical issues to attract a broader base or be satisfied with a narrow band as now. I am of the belief that this is perhaps the most fundamental question we face today.
- Community coordination – Unlike nearly any other party, we are seldom embraced or supported by other cycling organisations openly. Many allies can't even be named. Rather than being seen as a useful arm of advocacy, we are often looked upon by current cycling advocates as a challenge to their current model or potentially disruptive to their dependence on governments for funding. As long as we are not in government we are not a "go to" organisation for them. Being framed in such a manner is a significant factor in how we develop.

Summary of Risks

1. Financial sustainability
2. Committee membership – breadth and diversity
3. Changes to electoral law that may limit minor party participation
4. Loss of membership support
5. Ongoing lack of engagement and backing by other cycling community stakeholders

Options for the Future

We constantly need to test ourselves as to whether we can become more effective and what direction provides us with the best opportunity.

We have several choices today:

1. Stay as we are, addressing the key concerns above as we can
2. Broaden our base of support by allying more closely with organisations outside of traditional cycling advocacy but with common interests – eg Shared Path, disability, public transport and walking groups
3. Decommission the ACP as a political party and focus on aspects such as communication and evaluation
4. Maintain the party but withdraw from being involved in as many elections (eg drop federal efforts) and become focussed on independent advocacy and endorsement
5. Join forces with other parties to create a stronger single multi-issue coalition to provide an opportunity for electoral success

The least favoured scenario would be one where we are unable to meet the expectations of our members or have the ability to contribute to the vision we believe in: A cycling friendly Australia.

We have no time to lose, we need to select and push forward with a direction that will be the kind of party that can be an effective force for cycling – or we should get out of the way!