



Learning curve: Greater Wellington Regional Council active transport and road safety coordinator Simon Kennett briefs bus drivers as the "bikes 'n buses" workshop participants prepare to make a right-hand turn at traffic signals on Waterloo Rd.

Hot seat swap helps bus drivers, cyclists

Bus drivers are more aware how vulnerable it can feel to be cycling among tonnes of fast-moving metal.

Those on two wheels have a better appreciation that a bus needs a lot of room and the driver has vision blind spots.

That's the upshot of a Greater Wellington Regional Council "bikes 'n buses" workshop earlier this month.

Pedestrians and drivers around Lower Hutt may have caught sight of a long parade of high visibility bike riders cruising through town. Under those fluoro vests were 13 Valley Flyer and Runciman bus drivers as well as six cyclists.

This half-day programme brings drivers and riders together to share perspectives on using the road.

The cyclists toured the city with the drivers, helping them with visible hand signals, explaining the importance of safe lane positions and visibility.

They cheered them on after a grumpy pedestrian gave an unnecessary shout that riders should keep to the side of the road and a car driver almost

opened his door into their path.

Drivers around Lower Hutt were generally considerate of the large group, who followed traffic laws under the supervision of two cycle skills instructors from Cycling Advocates Network.

When the ride ended, it was time for the bus drivers to teach the cyclists about their 12-tonne rides.

Under the watchful eye of Valley Flyer drivers, a couple of whom are also bike commuters, the cyclists were able to experience driving a bus around a large sportsground carpark where there was plenty of room to practise their three-point turns and other safety manoeuvres.

While in the driver's seat, the cyclists also discovered the location of blind spots and felt the weight of responsibility that goes with the driver's job.

By the end of the day, both drivers and cyclists expressed a greater understanding of each others' safety concerns on the road.

Project manager for the New Zealand Cycling Advocates Net-

work, Patrick Morgan took part.

"There's a lot going on when you're driving a bus, and now I realise how much more concentration it requires than driving a car," he said afterwards.

"A driver needs to navigate the streets without much room to spare at the sides, and not forgetting about the load of passengers on board."

Most encouraging was the common ground that everyone in the room could agree on.

There was no question that riders often need to take the lane and travel ahead of other vehicles at intersections and roundabouts, on narrow streets, and on winding roads such as Eastbourne's Marine Drive.

In the past five years, there have been 24 reported collisions between buses and bikes in the region, some determined by police to be caused by the neglect or inexperience of riders and others by fault of the bus drivers.

GWRC and NZ Bus are keen to see the programme continue, and are considering quarterly workshops for both Go Wellington and Valley Flyer drivers.