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LTA removes all bicycle barriers after mishap

It is reviewing use of frames which were put up at walkways

By K. C. Vijayan

ALL the inverted U-shaped barriers at pedestrian walkways have been removed, after a man cycled into one at Tampines and was left paralysed.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA), which installed them, removed them on Sunday.

It also said that it was reviewing the use of these frames.

There were 14 of them placed at seven pedestrian overhead bridges and underpasses which have ramps for the wheelchair-bound.

Most were at intersections with expressways, like in Toa Payoh, Ang Mo Kio, Jalan Bukit Merah and Rangoon Road.

The eighth set, near Tampines Street 43, was removed by contractors last Friday - three days after it was put up - on the orders of ward MP Ong Kian Min, who is also chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Transport.

It was there that a 40-year-old father of two rode into one of the barriers at about 6.45am last Wednesday, while it was still dark.

The man is still in the intensive care unit. His condition is stable.

LTA chief executive Yam Ah Mee yesterday expressed deep regret over the mishap, saying: 'Our hearts go out to the injured cyclist and his family.'

LTA spokesman Lynne Ong said the barriers, the first of which was put up in 1997, were meant to encourage cyclists to dismount and push their bicycles along the walkways, so the wheelchair-bound could use them without danger.

'They were installed following public feedback that cyclists often pedalled on the walkways at high speed, posing a danger to themselves and other pedestrians,' she added.

'No cycling' signs were also displayed prominently at both ends of the crossings to prevent them from cycling on the walkways.

The signs have been up at the pedestrian overhead bridge where the accident occurred since 2001, but the LTA nevertheless received 'numerous' complaints that cyclists were speeding along the bridge.

So the barriers were put up.

The mishap occurred after the barrier was installed at one end but before the one at the other end was put up.

Now, the family of the paralysed man is agonising over how to tell him about his condition.

His 50-year-old brother-in-law, who asked not to be named, said yesterday: 'I've known him since he was in Primary 2 and have seen him grow up, get married and become a father. I feel very sad when I see him in this condition.'

He said the family is discussing with doctors how best and when to break the news to him.

'LTA's decision to remove the barriers is a positive and good sign,' he added.

When contacted last night, Mr Ong said he was 'happy' with LTA's decision to remove the barriers and reconsider the design. 'There're some fundamental flaws in the design.'

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