



Statement on Inclusion and Racing at the Velodrome

We understand that the recent KPBS article raised serious concerns for many people in our community, and we have listened carefully to those concerns. The article was published under the title that the “San Diego Velodrome is hosting bike races that exclude trans women.” It reported that “transgender women were not allowed to compete.” It suggested that our organization, and even the City, may be exposed to liability for discrimination. It framed all of this as the result of a policy change made “under pressure from the Trump administration.” Those are serious statements. They are the kind of statements that would naturally leave people angry, disappointed, and afraid that a place they trusted had changed in some fundamental way. If it were true, then that would be deeply concerning to members of this community, since the Velodrome has been deeply committed to creating a safe and inclusive place for all members.

To those who actually know this community, that picture would come as a shock. For years, the San Diego Velodrome has built most of its racing around open categories and ability-based fields rather than rigid divisions based only on gender. Everyone in the field is simply a racer. At our track, I think we have done an excellent job of keeping the racing fair, welcoming, and exciting at every level. In addition to our open and ability-based fields, we have an openly inclusive Women+ field where trans women are welcome. This year, we expanded those opportunities and decided to hold those races every Friday night. On most of those nights, you can look at our podium and see trans women and cisgender women smiling side by side. In this political climate, at this moment in time, that is rare. It is special. It is something we have worked hard to build.

As one might expect, this article has deeply impacted our community. It has been the subject of online debates, and there have been rumors of potential protests at these races. I know people personally who are avoiding the Velodrome because they are uncomfortable with the controversy. The Board of Directors has received numerous emails about this topic since the article was published. It has stirred up a wide variety of opinions and questions. Our membership and those within our community are simply asking why we are doing these races, why we decided to exclude trans women from such an inclusive community, and whether our values suddenly changed. All of those are valid questions that should and need to be addressed.

I believe that most of the confusion is caused by the grossly misleading nature of this article. The very title indicates that we are excluding people from our races. That is not true. We have not excluded anyone from any of our races, and we will not. Following the inquiry over trans women competing in USAC races at the velodrome, I wrote a statement to the membership and to this reporter, which did not make the article, and I stated: "I want to be clear that it is not the responsibility of the San Diego Velodrome to gender our athletes or to police anyone's identity. If a rider registers and holds a license identifying as female, we are not going to be the ones questioning that or making our volunteers responsible for judging someone's original sex." When a person signs up for a USA Cycling license, they have to check a box and identify their gender as male or female. As I have indicated, the San Diego Velodrome will honor whatever gender anyone may choose. We have never told a trans rider they are not welcome to compete in our USA Cycling races or any other race. A person may understandably feel uneasy because of the broader policy environment in organized sport. That feeling is real. It is still not the same thing as this organization denying someone access or excluding someone on the basis of gender identity.

The article tries to present a hypothetical scenario, that we have excluded someone from our races, and present it as fact. It then attempts to frame that supposed fact as ongoing and as something discriminatory and potentially illegal. The article states: "the association's decision to host USA Cycling races that exclude trans women may expose it to legal liability and potential loss of access to the racetrack." It then quotes an attorney saying that if a trans woman seeks to race in the women's category at a USA Cycling race and is not allowed, she "would have grounds to sue for gender discrimination." California law does protect gender identity, and it should. But that theory depends on an already refuted hypothetical, not on an actionable event carried out by this organization. It depends on the claim that the Velodrome has denied

someone access to racing because of gender identity. We have not done that, and we will not.

The Velodrome's stance on this issue is actually unusual. In most other sports, the categories are more rigidly defined, and trans women are not permitted to compete in the women's category under the rules set by their national governing bodies. The NCAA uses the same category standard as USA Cycling, and public colleges participating in NCAA competition are subject to the same anti-discrimination principles as the Velodrome, yet they continue to operate at an institutional level without that alone being treated as disqualifying. That broader context is worth noting here. The Velodrome has made a more deliberate effort than most to create inclusive opportunities within the structure we are operating under. Even within Morley Field, other organizations governed by outside sanctioning bodies with the same category restrictions continue to host events under the same special use permit. What makes the Velodrome different is not that we are uniquely restrictive. It is that we have made an unusual effort to remain inclusive in spite of those constraints.

It is important to tell the history of this categorization policy accurately, because it is highly relevant to this discussion. USA Cycling did not always take the position it takes today. In 2021, it publicly said, "Exclusion is the antithesis of sport," and said it welcomed transgender cyclists at every USA Cycling event. After the international governing body of cycling changed its international rule in 2023, USA Cycling still adopted a more flexible domestic policy, effective January 1, 2024, that allowed transgender athletes to apply to compete through different eligibility pathways. The major shift came later. In 2025, USA Cycling said that the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee had concluded that national governing bodies were required, under federal law and the 2025 executive order, to adopt a new definition of the women's category. Whatever one thinks of that rule, it was not created by USA Cycling.

There is, whether you and I agree with the decision or not, a real debate right now over the fairness of trans women competing in women's sports. At the highest levels of competition, where fractions of a percent matter, governing bodies have made decisions based on how they understand fairness in sex-based categories. You or I may not agree with the decision, but it is still important to recognize that the question exists, and that these questions will remain debated for the foreseeable future. At the same time, I believe it is a mistake to import the full weight of that elite-level debate into local community racing without nuance. Community racing is not the Olympic

Games. At our track, the more important values are participation, belonging, development, challenge, friendship, and the love of the sport itself.

As I have stated before, under the current structure, if a trans woman were to identify as a woman on the USA Cycling license application, we are not going to make our volunteers the ones who police people's identities, and we will honor and respect what was listed on the license. However, USA Cycling policy allows that assessment to be challenged. If USA Cycling determines that a trans woman is not allowed to compete as a woman under those rules, it would pose a challenging situation for the Velodrome. While we will not deny someone access, having trans riders compete in our women's races could potentially risk us losing USA Cycling eligibility. Our solution is to structure the field administratively as an open category while continuing to advertise and run it locally as Women+. In practice, that preserves the thing that matters most: trans women can still race in our Women+ field alongside other women in our community without ever fearing that USA Cycling can deny them access to those races. The women in that field will be scored the same as any other women's field, and any upgrade points won during those races would apply in the same manner. We have discussed this openly with USAC, and they agreed that this is a practical solution they welcome.

While this may serve to solve the practical matter of inclusion, it does not solve the emotional one. Even if a trans woman is allowed to race in our Women+ field at a USA Cycling race, that does not change the fact that USA Cycling reserves the right to challenge a person's gender identity on their license. I can only imagine what that might bring up in someone. In a world that so often invalidates the identities of trans people, having to face that kind of question in a place that should feel safe must be difficult. It must feel lonely. That is why we have worked so hard to make trans people feel welcome here, because we know that the world is not always welcoming.

There is an argument that the San Diego Velodrome should boycott USA Cycling sanctioned racing because of a broader policy dispute. I understand that perspective. I do not think it is the most pragmatic path forward. A boycott will not force USA Cycling to defy an executive order and put them at risk of losing their status as the national governing body of the sport. The repercussions of a boycott would only fall on our riders. It would fall on the athletes at our track who have trained for years in a sport they love and who need sanctioned races to earn points, advance, and pursue national-level competition. It would fall on our juniors, who have dreams of seeing where this sport may take them. We have more than fifty young riders in our junior

program. They are not all competitive yet at the national level, but the few who stick with it will be ready in a couple of short years. If we choose not to run USA Cycling races, we would be denying them the opportunity to gain upgrade points, race in bigger races across the country, and compete at the National Championships. We would confine their growth to our local racing alone. If we close that path because of a policy made far above the level of our local community, we do not strengthen the sport. We diminish it.

It is a shame that a community that has worked this hard to be welcoming and inclusive was portrayed in a way that obscured that truth. The more honest story here is not that the San Diego Velodrome suddenly became exclusionary. The more honest story is that this community has welcomed trans riders, continues to do so, and is trying to navigate a difficult issue in a way that preserves both inclusion and opportunity.

Thank you,
Roger Ainslie