

An end to DISCRIMINATION

The need for new Commonwealth laws

by Alan Parker, People for Ecologically Sustainable Transport

ONLY when bicycle facilities are funded like other vehicle infrastructure will we be able to say that cyclists are no longer second class citizens. The bicycle lobby's worst failure was not ending Commonwealth discrimination years ago. It pains me that, after 21 years' advocacy, 10-year-old bikeplans are still unimplemented and provision of facilities fails to keep pace with urban growth.

To prevent the tragedy of Commonwealth discrimination continuing into the next millennium, we need a successful lobbying campaign like the one conducted by the Bicycle Federation of America. In the US, a commitment to cycling is entrenched in legislation and equates to funding of facilities. Under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA), funding for US\$1 billion worth of bicycle/pedestrian projects has been committed in the last four years. In future over US\$1 billion per year may be provided for bicycle and pedestrian facilities, with five federal dollars for every local government dollar offering an enormous incentive to bikeway building. ISTEA suits the Clinton agenda to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, clean up polluted air in cities and reduce automobile dependence.

Since abandoning the Jobs on Local Roads Program, our Commonwealth government has allocated no regular funding for bicycles and States have spent only one dollar for every local government dollar on bikeways. With the Commonwealth rejecting its essential funding and coordinating role, little has happened – despite the existence of strategic bikeplans for all urban areas over 150,000 population and local bikeplans for around 35% of all local governments areas. Of the states, only Western Australia offers an adequate incentive to local government to build bicycle facilities, providing three state dollars for every local government dollar (*Cyclist* February–March).

With only modest funding needed, the problem is not lack of resources but discriminatory policy. Current Commonwealth planning and inquiries look set to perpetuate the discrimination. The most damaging forms of discrimination occur in the Commonwealth's forward planning process and the major parties' transport policies.

The Commonwealth government has no concept of orderly nation building based on ecologically sustainable development. Australian transport forward planning is a model of anarchy and disorder with random government inquiries and policy changes. Actions contradict national ESD and Greenhouse reduction strategies and world best practice for sustainable transport.

Discrimination against non-motorised travel is built into the economic rationalist agenda in Federal Parliamentary and other inquiries. Bureaucrats have no intention of providing for cycling or walking in the manner of countries where sustainable transport is taken seriously.

The most recent example of discrimination in forward planning is the Discussion Paper on the National Greenhouse Strategy. In the absence of any commitment of Commonwealth funding incentives, its recommendations on "promotion of non-motorised travel (walking and cycling)" are worthless. Four other current inquiries need to recommend Commonwealth funding for bicycle facilities:

The Parliamentary Inquiry into Federal Road Funding affords an opportunity to change the Commonwealth role in road funding and gain recognition of the need for an Australian ISTEA.

The White paper on Sustainable Energy Policy for Australia should

recommend increased bicycle use as a long term transport demand management measure to conserve oil reserves.

The Inquiry into Urban Air Pollution in Australia should recommend using bicycles as substitute for short urban car trips, with implementation via an Australian ISTEA.

The Senate Parliamentary Inquiry into Commonwealth Environmental Powers should recommend an Australian version of ISTEA as part of an environmental law package to enable Australia to honour ESD and international climate treaty obligations.

So far the BFA and PEST have made submissions to the first three of the above inquiries. Only at the end of 1997 when their

recommendations are published will we know if discrimination against cyclists in Commonwealth forward planning will continue.

Given concerns about increasing health costs, the health minister and the AMA should also support Commonwealth funding of bicycle infrastructure and national funded programs to increase bicycle use. BFA President Dr Harry Owen has already made progress in this area.

The prime example of discrimination by the major political parties is the view pushed for ten or so years by Liberal, Labor and National Parties, that bicycles are purely a state and local government responsibility. For decades before, even grosser discrimination derived from the unspoken view that cyclists were an obsolete form of transport and the quicker they were run off the roads the better. There were exceptions, like Brian Dixon who in 1974 proposed building a bikepath along the Yarra River. Years later he recalled being laughed at by his Parliamentary colleagues and rubbished by the media.

A shift in attitudes has not translated to action. The National Bicycle Strategy, released three weeks before the 1993 election, was nothing but a gimmick, chock full of motherhood statements but without legal commitment to ongoing funding. In federal government, only the Democrat senators support Commonwealth funding.

Australia needs to emulate world best practice on sustainable transport policy, as seen in the Netherlands and Scandinavia and in US and UK initiatives. Coupled with ISTEA, the US has produced a National Bicycling and Walking Study in 24 volumes and has committed federal government staff to ensure the coordination of state activity and state bicycle planning units.

Australia's National Bicycle Strategy also lacked the essential backing of planning guidelines like the UK environmental planning law (PPG 13 – 1994). Under PPG 13, only plans and projects assessed as "sustainable" are funded and recent funding allocations have clearly favoured authorities adopting the sustainable approach (CTC 1997). The UK's National Bicycle Strategy is supported by a Depart-

ISTEA funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects:

National Highway System. Funds may be used to construct bikeways or walk ways on land adjacent to any highway on the national highway system (other than the Interstate System).

Surface Transport Programs. 10% of these funds are for "transportation enhancement" and may be used for either construction of walkways or non construction projects such as safety literature and route maps.

Congestion Mitigation and Air Quality Improvement. Funds may be used for bicycle transportation facilities and walkways our safety related non construction projects.

Federal Lands Highway Funds. May be used for bicycle transportation facilities and walkways in conjunction with roads, highways and parkways.

Scenic Byways Program Funds. May be used to construct facilities for pedestrians and cyclists along scenic highways.

National Recreational Trails Fund. May be used to benefit bicyclists and others in accordance with Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plans.

State and community safety programs. The priority status of bicyclist and pedestrian safety programs makes it easier to get funds.

Federal transit funds. May be used for improved bicycle and pedestrian access to transit facilities, including bicycle shelters and storage and equipment to carry bikes.

ment of Transport bicycle planning unit and funded under PPG 13. Since May 1994 DOT funding for cycling projects has tripled.

Australia's lack of a serious bicycle strategy, national funding and national coordination through a bicycle planning unit show the indifference of politicians to cyclists' fundamental right to safe and convenient access. They must be persuaded, as in the US and the UK, of the need to make bicycle friendly laws.

ISTEA funding provisions for bicycle and pedestrian projects are set out in the box. Most of the \$A1 billion spent through ISTEA since 1992 has been part of air quality improvement programs jointly sponsored by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Bicycle advocates should realise that ISTEA came about as a result of the lobbying efforts of the Bicycle Federation of America and the changing attitudes in the US Department of Transport. After years of lobbying came years of legislative change, beginning in 1990 with a new US DOT policy to:

Promote increased use of bicycling, encourage planners and engineers to accommodate bicycle and pedestrian needs in designing transportation facilities for urban and suburban areas.

The policy shift occurred against a background similar to Australia's: a decline in cycling from 1.5% to 0.7% of all trips in the 20 years to 1990 (despite a large increase in adult bicycle ownership) and some experimental projects and bicycle plans completed but few facilities in place. At the root lay a gross deficiency in federal funding. Addressing the 1990 Pro Bike Conference, the Federal Highway Administrator committed to a process of change. Congress later approved a full-time bicycle coordinator position in the Secretary of Transport's office and \$1 million for a National Bicycle and Walking study. Priority and funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs was assured when President Bush signed the ISTEA. Unlike in Australia, too few State and local governments were organised to take advantage of ISTEA funding; so in 1992 steps were taken to appoint full time bicycle/pedestrian coordinators in all States.

The 1993 National Bicycling and Walking Study was undertaken to assist in preparing bikeplans and behavioural programs. It found higher levels of bicycle commuting in the medium and larger cities with more bikeways and bikelanes and in the small University cities, which had bikelanes on most major roads - Davis 25%, Madison 12%, Gainesville 10%, Boulder 9%, and Eugene 8%. The Study concluded that bicycle facilities will increase bicycle use. (NB & WS No.1 1993). The National Bicycling and Walking Study also identified further steps for the U.S. DOT and other agencies, to put in place State Bicycle Coordinators and mobilise potential applicants for federal funds. By 1996 this resulted in \$400 million spent on bicycles.

ISTEA funding is likely to increase to US\$1 billion per year, unless a few Republicans who want all ISTEA funds for building freeways are successful. However, the bicycle industry has given the Bicycle Federation of America US\$350,000 to stop that happening and prevent any watering down of the ISTEA.

Australia needs a new transport Act to treat cyclists equally with other transport users and provide "catch-up" programs to compensate for past neglect. An Australian Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act would be an elegant solution because it would tackle the problems of air pollution, GHG emissions and oil conservation and much else besides, all in one package.

Funding is urgently needed for three things:

- Invest \$100 million in the next two years on implementing facilities under existing bikeplans.
- Produce a National Bicycle Infrastructure plan for the next 10 years; strategic area plans that include bicycle infrastructure are needed for all capital cities.
- Establish a national Bicycle Planning Group to ensure that the states spend the funds available, develop nationally significant pilot programs, and coordinate the development of the National Bicycle Infrastructure Plan.

In 10 years bicycle infrastructure should approach the level of service that now exists in the Netherlands which, because it has almost the same population as urban Australia, can be used as a general indicator of the level of funding required. Because generous national

funding was provided for 20 years, cycling did not decline in the Netherlands as in so many other countries, but increased to 13 billion bicycle km in 1995. As around six billion of these bicycle km replaced short car trips, mostly with cold engines, this represents a massive reduction in air pollution, GHG emissions and fuel consumption and long term benefits of \$100s of millions (Parker 1995).

The problem for the Bicycle Federation of Australia today is a lack of contacts among people who have the power to change policy and create enabling environmental legislation. Making submissions to government inquiries and making high level political contacts are complementary activities. Inquiry recommendations are rarely implemented without the high level political support as well. There is no full time Canberra bicycle lobbyist, like the Bicycle Federation of America had in Washington, supported by bicycle industry funding. In the political arena the BFA is not known nationally like the ACF. BFA has to go out and do what I have already done in getting Democrat support, and it is going to be a much harder task with the Federal Liberal and Labor parties, the Commonwealth transport bureaucracy and government inquiries now underway. BFA President Harry Owen last issue appealed for help. He said "write to me care of this magazine". Do it. Victorian cyclists can phone me on (03) 9689 3693.

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