



Bikeways to help bridge employment gap? Call for new CEP scheme

by **ALAN PARKER**

BIKEWAY PROJECTS are practical options for Bob Hawke to provide jobs in 1992. They also fit in with the PM's statement on Environmentally Sustainable Development and the need to reduce motorised travel.

Many low skilled workers have little chance of finding work before major infrastructure projects come on line in 1993/94, but in the interim socially useful work can be accomplished through short term provision of jobs funded by a revived Commonwealth Employment Program (CEP).

Proposed CEP Bikeway Construction Project

The specific proposal is that the Commonwealth provide \$17 million to "fast track" implementation of the Melbourne Bikeway plan (completed in 1986). Other cities could also benefit from funding for their bikeplans.

The Melbourne scheme could create a metropolitan-wide network of safe, residential street routes linked together by a combination of already existing bike paths and those to be built with the \$17 million. It would enhance Melbourne as a place to rear children and a tourist destination and help reduce greenhouse emissions and air pollution generally by encouraging more cycling and less driving.

The proposal is feasible. The last Commonwealth Employment Program (CEP), set up in response to the 1983 recession, included 380 bikeway projects which used \$38 million of CEP funds and gave 3500 Australians jobs for up to a year. The CEP required projects with a minimum of 50%

*CEP bikepath in use along Maribyrnong River in Essendon, Victoria, 1986
(Photo: Alan Parker)*

direct labour costs: building bike paths is very labour intensive, using between 50% and 70% direct labour depending on construction methods and terrain.

Other works could also be undertaken, such as the repair of existing bicycle paths, painting bike lanes, repairing the edges of roads which are bicycle routes and building small bridges or underpasses across physical barriers to open up short cuts for cyclists and pedestrians. These works would also be labour intensive.

Bicycle plans have been prepared for most large Australian cities and these metropolitan wide plans are supported by numerous local government plans that are much more detailed. What needs to be built has thus already been identified and the preparatory design work can be done quickly. State governments can set up small CEP design teams to assist local government, as was done by the Ministry of Planning in Victoria in 1984. The existence of State Bicycle Committees in all States should make co-ordination much easier than it was during the last CEP.

Far less progress has been made in Sydney and an estimated \$21 million is needed there. Around \$15 million could be spent in Brisbane and around \$8 million in both Adelaide and Perth. A further \$12 million in total could be spent in other cities with prepared bike plans. This \$85 million CEP expenditure, provided on the basis of five CEP dollars for every local dollar, could create 7,000 jobs for around 6 months, giving some relief for those hardest hit and least able to cope with the recession — the older breadwinners. Younger workers may benefit more from

programs based on education and training.

In terms of today's prices, the proposed expenditure is twice that of the last CEP program. On the basis of experience in the last CEP, it is estimated the proposal could be implemented in the next two financial years — if government can pull the administrative finger out before next March.

The proposal is based on my experience as a bicycle planner working on a \$2 million CEP bikeway construction project in 1984. As a long time former member of the Victorian State Bicycle Committee, representing cyclists, I have an intimate knowledge of the Melbourne bike plan and know this project can be made to work. Estimates of the costs in other States are based on my involvement in bicycle planning there.

People with the expertise to put together labour intensive projects need to speak up in the next month or so. Democrat senators are particularly interested in such proposals. (Address to: Democrat Briefings, C/- Senator Meg Lees, 2A Waterloo St, Glenelg SA 5045. Send me a copy at 50 Stirling St, Footscray Vic 3011.)

There is a need for a crash program to re-introduce CEP by next March so that local councils and other agencies can launch projects in the coming financial year. Councils have an important role in implementing the CEP and a major interest, as it is crucial for many to boost local spending power to revive the community.

Figures for long term unemployment in industrial suburbs are likely to reach three times the figure for middle class suburbs. In Melbourne's western suburbs, over 7000 people will have been unemployed for over a year by June '92 and numbers Australia-wide will top 300,000. In working class suburbs the incomes from even

short term jobs go mostly to local purchases of food and essentials and, in turn, keep local shops, trades and businesses alive. Thus CEP funds spin on and help to stop local enterprises going bankrupt or moving out. The CEP dollar circulates in these areas, helping a lot more people than just the direct recipient.

The successful CEP bikeway construction projects between 1983 and 1986 have been of great value to cyclists. Many more projects have this kind of potential. So many human services need to be provided, so many things need to be done to improve our built environment, conserve soils and care for nature. It is inconceivable that some of the many unemployed cannot do "constructive" work.

It is tragic that no agency of government is looking for the numerous examples of where the market fails to deliver the goods and recognising that CEP initiatives can bridge the need.

Keating's views, repeated to Victorians by Premier Kirner, that "schemes like the old Commonwealth Employment Program are not the way to go" are untrue and unjust. Managing economic risk should have been on their agenda and included emergency plans to re-introduce a CEP. For the practically minded there is no easier way to provide work for tens of thousands of people in two years.

I am not suggesting that a CEP will



CEP workers laying tarmac on Moonee Ponds Creek bikepath, Victoria, 1984.

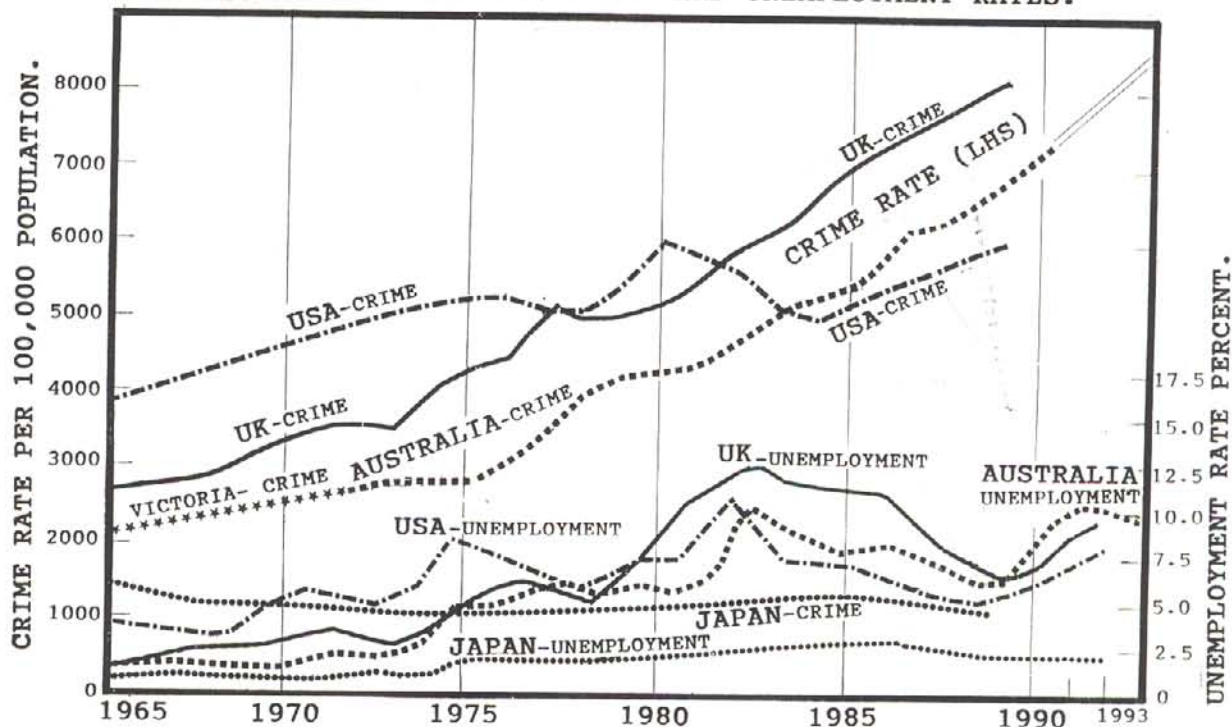
solve the problem for everyone. It will, however, ease the pain and demonstrate some kind of solidarity between the so-called government of reform and the families bearing the brunt of the recession.

The latest news from Canberra and the

Trade Union Movement is that there is a groundswell of opinion in favour of re-introducing a CEP. Cyclists must add their voices to this growing demand. The long term benefits of bikeways are many times more than the initial funding.

(Alan Parker is Vice President of the Town and Country Planning Association of Victoria and a former Vice-President of the BFA, 1982-86. He promoted the original CEP program.)

UNEMPLOYMENT GENERATED GROWTH OF THE CRIME RATE 1965 TO 1993, ANGLE SAXON AND JAPANESE, CRIME AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES.



DATA SOURCES: Unemployment. ILO Year Books. ABS Economic Indicators.
 Crime rates. USA, Crime in the United States, Only Crime Index Offences.
 Japan, Statistics National Police Agency. Penal Code Offences.
 UK. Criminal Statistics UK. Indictable/Notifiable Offences, only.
 Australian, Violent and property offences 1972 to 1989. Victorian
 crime rate date 1965 to 1971. (The Peoples Force. Haldane 1986.)