

# If Perth can plan properly for cycling, why is Melbourne so bad?

by Alan Parker

**F**ROM 1975 to '85 Victoria led Australian bicycle planning. Yet, today only 700 km of Melbourne's 3,300 km principal bicycle network has been built and the State Bicycle Committee has been reduced and downgraded. Now, WA leads the way with cycling integrated into its overall transport plan, a commitment to construct a \$58 million bicycle network and 12 Department of Transport staff dedicated to bicycle issues.

## Integrating bicycles in transport planning

Perth proposes to increase bicycle trips on an average week day to 11.5% of all trips (slightly less than the 12.5% proposed for public transport) and to quadruple total bicycle trips by 2029. The Perth Metropolitan Transport Strategy also proposes to reduce car driver trips per capita on an average week day from 2.13 in 1991 to 1.54 in 2029, with average trip length reducing from 8.4 km to 7.32 km. While Perth's population is expected to increase by 70% by 2029, total car and truck vehicle kilometres travelled is only expected to increase from 25.8 million in 1991 to 28.1 million in 2029.

These sustainable transport trends echo the Netherlands' bicycle friendly approach to transport planning. Both approaches seek to stop improvements in vehicle technology being swallowed up by a large increase in car use. The Dutch national government investment in bicycle infrastructure is around \$200 million a year at today's prices over 20 years (Parker, 1994).

In the Netherlands 28% of all trips are made by bicycle and they plan to have 50% more trips by bicycle. WA cannot hope to achieve so much after 20 years of neglect. However in Perth a serious attempt has been made to emulate world best practice and invest real funds and human resources in cycle facilities.

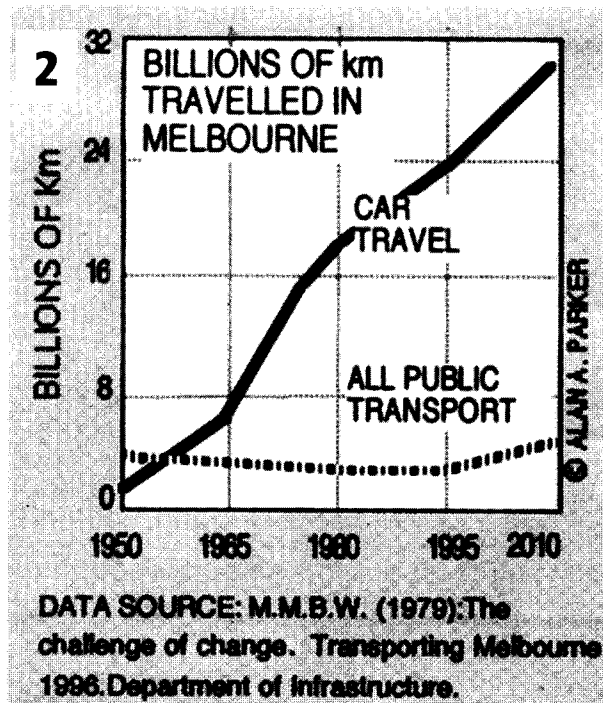
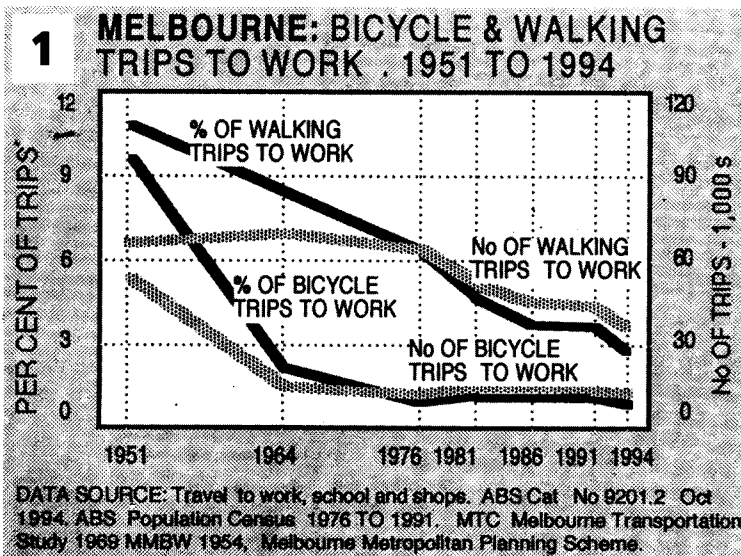
The Perth Bicycle Network Plan is a costed plan fully integrated into the Perth Metropolitan Transport Strategy. The Perth Metropolitan Transport Strategy is a much better planning model for all forms of transport than the new Transporting Melbourne strategy. Transporting Melbourne has no bikeway network funding proposal incorporated. Indeed, the State Bicycle Committee has no idea what funding is necessary and has not made the required input to the transport planning process.

Transporting Melbourne's only detailed costed commitment is to new roads and freeways. The proposed "orbital transport corridor" will create centrifugal patterns of urban growth and land-use activity similar to Los Angeles and help generate unsustainable levels of motor vehicle use. The strategy fails entirely to deal with the growth in car use and escalating costs of road congestion in inner and middle suburbs. The solution is not more freeways but to reduce single-occupant car travel, thus giving commercial vehicles, buses and trams greater mobility. Using Perth as a model, around 150% increase in patronage of the metropolitan rail system is also necessary by 2015, not the pitiful 50% increase included as a vague, uncosted proposal.

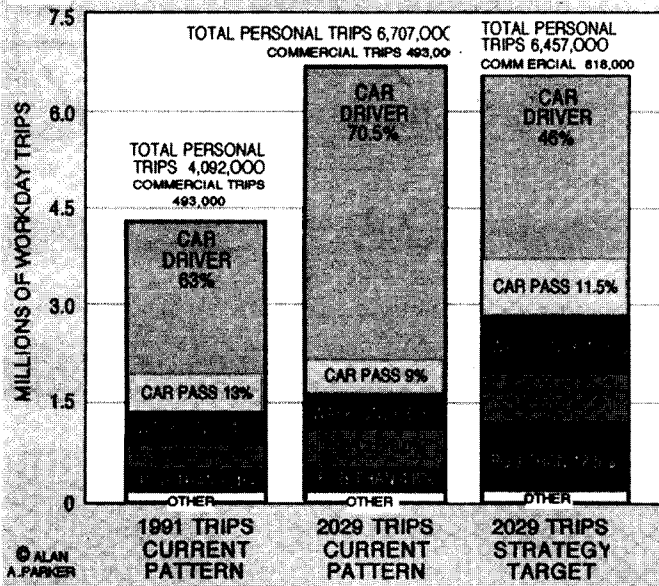
There is the usual rhetoric about cycling being a good thing when what is needed is funding and engineering staff to design and build bicycle infrastructure. Transporting Melbourne should state that, by the year 2015, there should be around 2 billion bicycle km ridden and at least 30,000 commuters should be accessing rail stations or modal interchanges by bicycle (Parker 1996).

A supporting Bicycle Network Plan for Transporting Melbourne is needed like the one integrated with the Perth Metropolitan Transport Strategy. By 2015 around \$150 million (1995 prices) would be needed to create a continuous metropolitan bikeway network that local councils would choose to implement because an appropriate 3-to-1 funding incentive existed. In Melbourne, with its much more extensive fixed rail network and higher urban density than Perth, 75% of the population still lives within easy cycling distance of a railway station (2.5 km), so this is technically easier to accomplish.

In a long term national planning context, cycling has to be part of a package of transport measures, designed to make people healthier, improve access for all including the transport poor, reduce air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions and reduce our dependence on rapidly depleting oil. The Commonwealth must take responsibility for some of these changes in order to support transport planning initiatives in the states. The Commonwealth's appalling failure to honour the Climate Change Treaty makes one ashamed to be an Australian.



### 3 PERTH METROPOLITAN TRANSPORT STRATEGY NUMBER AND PERCENTAGE OF WORKDAY TRIPS



### Resourcing bicycle networks

The third stage of the Melbourne Bikeplan was completed in 1984, coinciding with the availability of Commonwealth job creation funds. Economic rationalism in Victoria meant only \$8 million was spent there while WA, with one third the population, spent \$10.2 million. More recently in WA, local councils receive three state dollars for every one of their own as an incentive to build bicycle facilities. Victorian councils receive only one dollar, so most municipalities do less than they could.

In the next four years, \$25 million has been allocated in WA to extend the existing bikeway network, which is already better than Melbourne's. Using Perth as a rough model we can estimate that \$75 million is needed for bicycle facilities as a short term boost in Melbourne to meet its population's cycling needs.

Melbourne's proposed Principal Bicycle Network is a concept plan based on the extensive bicycle route evaluation and survey work (\$1 million) done for the Melbourne Bikeplan between 1979 and 1986. Route maps were produced clearly identifying hazardous intersections and giving a safety rating to all kerbside lanes on main roads. All that remained was to set up an engineering team and proceed with detailed design work. Instead VicRoads bureaucrats and Minister Jim Kennan dumped the Melbourne Bikeplan.

The bicycle strategies produced later, by the Labor Government (1990) and Liberals (1994), were mostly public relations exercises. Each strategy postponed by several years what really had to be done. It was argued the state government could not afford to employ people to look after the needs of the 700,000 Melbourne cyclists over 12 years of age (though as many people cycle on an average day as use the buses and trams which thousands are employed to operate and service).

Perth had early problems too but now 12 people are employed in the transport department's Bikewest to plan and provide bicycle facilities and behavioural programs.

### Planning and designing bikeway networks

I set out the need for a Melbourne Bikeplan and arterial bicycle network in my book *Safe Cycling* (Parker, 1977). This followed a recommendation in the model Geelong Bikeplan of 1977. In 1979 the first stage of the Melbourne Bikeplan was completed, putting Victoria five years ahead of WA in bicycle planning.

In 1986 the fourth and final report of the Melbourne Bikeplan was released. An arterial bicycle network of around 3,300 km of on-road and off-road routes and an extensive local route network mostly on quiet residential streets was developed. A series of route maps published by the Ministry of Transport identified the routes and

graded kerbside lane safety on main roads, serving as a planning guide for local council engineers. The fact that the route maps could be sold to cyclists as well meant they could be printed in six colours.

The bikeplan report also recommended that the State Bicycle Committee remain in the Ministry of Transport with a staff of 3 plus a part time chairman; that the Road Traffic Authority employ bicycle safety coordinators to train school teachers; and that the design engineers in the road construction authority ensure provision of necessary bikeways and bicycle crossings as part of all new main roads and road improvement projects.

The report *Width of Kerbside Lanes* (Loder and Bayly 1989) resolved outstanding technical problems of how to treat main roads. An engineering team set up then could have dealt with the so-called technical problems used recently as an excuse for doing nothing. The only real problem has been the lack of political will to confront the human resource problem of employing engineers.

According to Bicycle Victoria's booklet *It Can Be Done* it would take \$7 million a year over ten years to finish implementing the Principal Bicycle Network referred to in *Transporting Melbourne*, that is the 2000 km of priority on-road routes and 800 km of off road routes. BV says only 200 km (10%) of the on-road priority routes have been established and only 500 km (62%) of the off-road routes. Equally important are local feeder bicycle routes; BV has found only one third of the municipalities can say what local routes have been provided and where they are. The cost of completing the local bicycle network is also unknown. The State Bicycle Committee does not know where the local bike routes are because it lacks the staff needed to monitor and map the routes on a master plan.

### Other problems requiring engineering team work

The Stage 1 Melbourne Bikeplan (1979) also recommended upgrading bicycle storage facilities at rail stations. This was ignored and between 1979 and 1996 7,000 bicycles were stolen from railway



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**RIGHT: Melbourne Bike Maps should have been used as a planning guideline for engineers but the Victorian government never employed the engineers**

stations. Only a token 350 bicycle lockers have been provided in 16 years. In Perth (and Brisbane) it took only three years to provide as many lockers as Melbourne. Bicycle theft generally in Melbourne has cost cyclists well over \$4 million per year for the last 15 years.

Furthermore, the default speed limit was to be reduced from 60 to 50 km/h in the proposed Australian National Road Rules. Although it was agreed to by other states, it was sabotaged by the Victorian Minister for Roads and Ports, and VicRoads bureaucrats. That surely would not have happened if Victoria had the equivalent of Bikewest.

Victoria needs at least six engineers plus support staff, working on technical issues, either in a single planning unit like Bikewest or separately in the various road and transport agencies. Government should be employing the staff for designing bicycle facilities to ensure a commitment to their implementation. In my view, it is a waste of cyclist resources to attempt to plan facilities from the outside. Cyclists should be lobbying for Commonwealth bicycle infrastructure funding, to encourage states to give greater priority to bicycles.

The failure of bicycle planning in Victoria is reflected in a decline in bicycle transportation, as will be confirmed by the 1996 Census data on bicycle trips to work. The decline in the percentage of bicycle trips to work in metropolitan Melbourne is shown on chart 1. This decline continued, though more slowly, through the 1980s, despite the big

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### It's not just them; It's us

In Victoria it is too easy to blame the government or the manipulating bureaucrats, sadly there is more to it than that. To make matters worse, the actual neglect of cyclist needs over 10 or more years indicates a failure of the bicycle movement either to negotiate or to stand ground and fight on critical issues. As there have always been several cyclists on the Victorian State Bicycle Committee and the record shows that they did stop the Melbourne Bikeplan from being scrapped, the bicycle movement is clearly part of the problem. For the first time in 10 years Bicycle Victoria failed to stop negative ministerial action, sadly it did not even try.

At the time cyclists needed most to protest, too many thought that riding from one end of Victoria to the other was, by some mystical process, going to persuade government to do what is necessary. Musclebound masochism is no substitute for both technical knowledge and political clout. The bicycle movement must learn that people who do not know what level of funding and staffing is actually required are in no position to persuade government to do what is necessary. The greatest weakness lies in the State Bicycle Committee where bureaucrats have manipulated cyclist committee members. The Committee needs new people on it and should be hosted by the powerful new agency, the Department of Infrastructure.

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- (Alan Parker was President of Bicycle Victoria in 1984 and 1985.)

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