

Locker-bike disaster

The solution to rail authorities which ignore cyclists' needs may be to send in the bicycle shock troops

Like the ill-fated Pan Am flight 103, Australian cyclists have been sabotaged. Bureaucrats, with no understanding of the needs of the people they are supposed to serve, are running down the passenger rail systems of our biggest States, deterring dual-mode commuting and cycling itself, says ALAN PARKER.

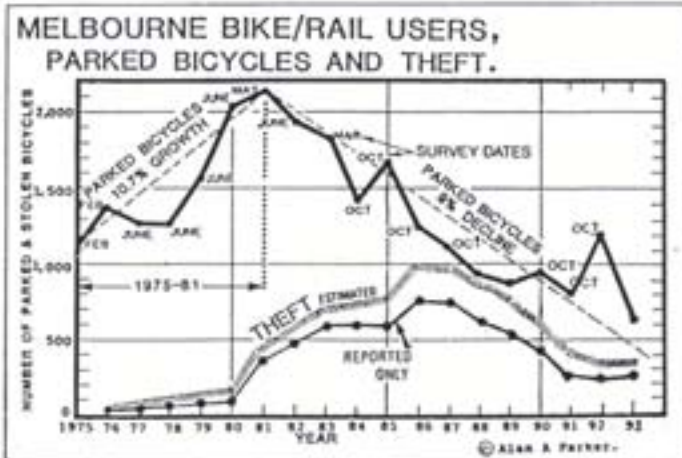
PPROMOTION of bike/rail transport is an essential element of the National Bicycle Strategy. Yet, in NSW and Victoria, rail authorities continue to ignore the need for secure bicycle storage facilities.

With most of the bicycle racks provided at stations failing the Australian Standard for long term bicycle parking, bicycle theft is rampant. Sales of bicycles to adults have risen over the last 20 years and more are now sold annually than cars. So why isn't Australia following the example other countries have set of using bikes to increase public transport patronage and profits?

When a country neglects to develop public transport to its full potential, it wastes energy resources and renders urban development ecologically unsustainable. Continuing car dependence is one reason a recent ASTEC report shows that Australian emissions of the Greenhouse gas carbon dioxide will increase by 20% between 1990 and 2000. Meanwhile, in the Netherlands, rail authorities are implementing the National Bicycle Master Plan, encouraging cycle access and providing secure bicycle storage. They are well on their way to increasing train travel by 15%.

At the same time, the Netherlands is successfully reducing growth of carbon dioxide emissions, already much lower than Australia's on a per capita basis. Australian rail

authorities are ignoring the call in both national ESD and Greenhouse Response Strategies to promote bike/rail transport as part of efforts to meet our international commitment on reducing greenhouse gases.



Melbourne: A case study of bureaucratic and political blunders

When Labor came to power in 1982 there were 2000 bicycles parked at Melbourne and suburban stations. By the time present transport Minister, Alan Brown, arrived there were 1000. We are now down to 630 and the number of bike/rail patrons has dropped to the lowest level since 1972. Last year, 340 bicycles were stolen from stations and Minister Brown is doing nothing to stop 50%, on average, of all parked bicycles being stolen every year. The graph, above, shows the 1993 data and trends since 1981.

The Transport Policy of the Victorian Coalition states, "The coalition is not prepared to let the lawbreakers continue to ruin the public transport system" and will be "contracting with the private sector to provide secure parking for bicycles". Yet nothing has been done. Pre-election, in July 1991, Alan Brown wrote to me that "the present government is either unable or unwilling to address the situation adequately. However the Coalition government will move to remedy this problem after the next state election". What has happened is that the Public Transport Commission management has given him the mushroom treatment, as it did previous Labor ministers, and only token efforts will be made to stop bicycle thieves.

Compare the election promise with his performance. In December 1993 he wrote to me that, "the police have sole responsibility for the reduction of theft" and the request for secure bicycle parking had been passed on to the Police Minister. By way of an afterthought he writes "funding is not available for bicycle lockers ... by working with the police the incidence of bicycle thefts can be reduced." Unfortunately for Alan Brown the police know that prevention is the name of the game and if secure storage is not provided the police cannot work miracles.

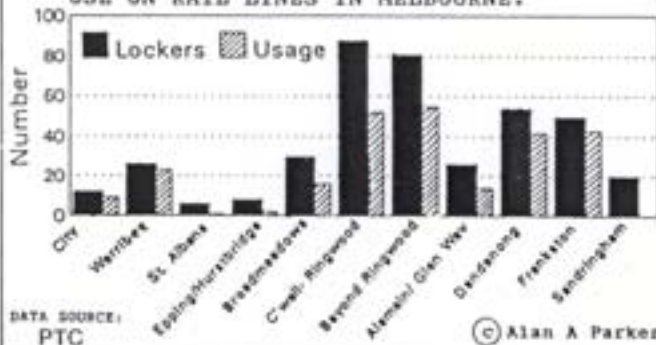
A letter (3-1-94) from the Chief Superintendent of the Transit Police District sensibly states, "...the answer to bicycle theft lies in the method of storage of the bicycle, and not in policing. Secure storage facilities within the vicinity of stations, would seem to be the best answer to the problem". So it is, and technical reports on bicycle parking have been saying this since 1979 while overseas experience confirms it beyond the slightest shadow of doubt. The Standards Association of Australia and the Austroads design guidelines for bicycle storage all follow world best practice, but the PTC engineers fail to provide adequate facilities for cyclists.

Today 300 more bicycle lockers are urgently needed at stations, in addition to the 350 lockers currently available and in working order. Due to poor user information services only 250 are actually used. See the bar chart, next page, showing the distribution of lockers by rail Melbourne lines and the photo of a Victorian bicycle locker installation.

It is also necessary to remove the 2,500 "rabbit ear" racks that only lock the front wheel, and are mostly located where bike thieves prefer them to be. The more successful thieves usually use a getaway vehicle and bolt cutters and can park a ute next to the racks ready to race off. After taking just a few seconds to chop through chains and cables and throw the bikes in the back of the ute, away he goes.

Consider my 1982 photograph of Mordialloc station (next page) which shows 11 bicycles locked by only one wheel in a location off the platform out of sight of station staff and passers by on the nearby street. This rack installation is designed to encourage thieves and explains why there are only three bicycles at Mordialloc station today in lockers.

Bicycle Lockers March 1993.
NUMBER OF LOCKERS AVAILABLE AND IN
USE ON RAIL LINES IN MELBOURNE.



My theft records show that between 1981 and 1993, 56 bicycles were reported as stolen which means around 90 were actually stolen, because victim surveys by the Australian Institute of Criminology show that 35% of thefts are not reported in cities with more than one million population. This means that a lot of local cyclists become aware of the theft problem.

If you want to lose passengers, provide cyclists with rabbit ear racks. The smart cyclists will not use them and probably travel by car instead, the dumb cyclists will use them and lose their bicycles and probably end up driving, too. For the transport-poor, most of whom live beyond convenient walking distance of a station, it is a form of discrimination that is very restrictive of their mobility if there no alternative bus service — an important factor that has been totally ignored by the rail authorities who have been funded by the federal government to research out the needs of the transport disadvantaged.

The Public Transport Corporation has wasted nearly 10,000 rail patrons' bicycles over the last 14 years, encouraged bicycle thieves and ignored the needs of most of the transport-disadvantaged. The executives come to work in company cars — you see them all parked in the massive PTC head office car park — how would they possibly know about rail users' needs as they never use the trains themselves? The management culture needs changing, and getting rid of those company cars would be a good start. Provide them with free bicycles and a bicycle locker at their local station and we might get some understanding. Many rail executives in the Netherlands are bike/rail commuters.

Bicycle lockers in NSW

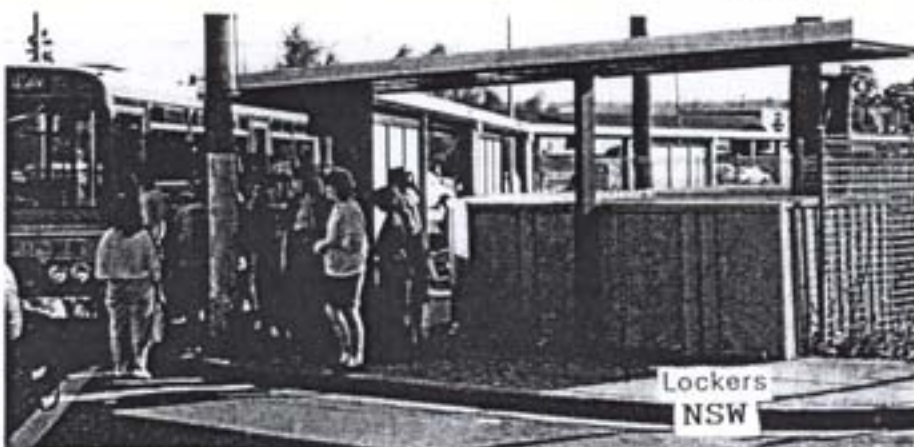
In 1981 the locker supplier "Bikloc" started negotiations with the State Rail Authority to supply lockers for hire at stations. However, it took five years of bureaucratic wrangling before the first lockers went in. When they did, they were a great success. There were large installations at Penrith and Campbelltown stations on the edges of the suburban network and lockers at 23 other stations, about 150 lockers in all. At the time there were more lockers around Sydney than Melbourne.

The photograph, bottom, shows some of the lockers at Campbelltown. The lockers come in clusters of eight in a double-sided configuration. They were better quality than the Victorian lockers because they were made of plastic coated steel, had stainless steel strip hinges and did not rust away as the Victorian ones do in two years if on bayside lines. The most interesting feature of the NSW lockers is that 75% of those who rented them had never been regular rail users. As they came an average distance of 4 kilometres that is not surprising but it does give a clear indication that there is a bike/rail mass market that can be developed. It was very successful pioneering effort by Brad Klewer the American who set up the Bikloc operation. Brad pioneered the use of lockers in Australia and arranged their manufacture in Australia.

Sadly, discussions between Klewer and the SRA on terms for leasing locker sites broke down and the lockers were removed. This happened after Bicycle NSW had released its Planning Officer's report "Bikes and Trains" which detailed the serious bicycle security problem and a need for bicycle lockers. This report was prepared for State Rail which failed to implement its recommendations. Their solution to the theft problem was apparently to get rid of the cyclists.

Despite a car parking space costing four times more than a bike locker, provision of car spaces received higher priority. Indeed, all of the \$2 million given to the SRA by the Federal government to provide better parking went on car parks — there was no bicycle parking. They did exactly the same thing in Victoria.

The situation is better nowadays with some new people in the bureaucracy. Even so, the chief executive of NSW State Rail told a transport seminar in Melbourne in 1993 that \$150 million was to be spent on upgrading stations but, when questioned by me about bicycle facilities planned at these stations, he said there were none and did not think there was a need for



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**DONT LEAVE IT ALL
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FIND A PLACE TO LOCK
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any. I thought this strange because there was a bike/rail study in progress of which he seemed unaware. I have since learnt that the bike/rail study is not concerned with the provision of bicycle facilities as part of the \$150 million program.

Send in the shock troops

It seems that in the Netherlands they have forgotten more about planning for bicycles than we ever knew. The volume of bicycle

feeder traffic has greatly increased with 45% of passengers cycling to their station of departure and 15% of passengers cycling from the station of destination. Likewise, in Japan, whose rail systems make big profits, there are now 3.25 million bike/rail patrons.

The problems we have in Australia are because our rail managements are incapable of learning from world best practice (see pages 64—65 *Cyclist* October—November '93). The bicycle movement also needs to learn from world best practice, in how to get the bureaucracy and government to do what is needed. Look at the most competent environment group in the world, Greenpeace. It gets things done. Greenpeace negotiates when it knows it will achieve real change, it refuses to negotiate when faced with what is known to be a bureaucratic or political con job. When the culture and attitudes of those

they are dealing with are damaging and beyond negotiation, they engage in direct action. Most direct actions are cleverly conceived media events that bring the issues out into the open. Think about Greenpeace and learn that direct action and negotiation are different sides of the same coin, they are complementary activities. Remember the "Rainbow Warrior".

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