



The fast track to more jobs

A Keynesian approach to civilising our cities and building bikeways

by ALAN PARKER

PRIME Minister Paul Keating has established a high level advisory group, called the Committee on Employment Opportunities, to recommend ways of restoring full employment. I have put in a submission calling for \$100 million to be spent over three years by local government to build bikeways in our major cities. According to prevailing economic rationalist argument, job creation schemes, particularly those for building bikeways, are not to be encouraged. However, I will show that bikeway building projects make good economic sense and are in accordance with the thinking of one of the greatest economists of all time, John Maynard

Keynes and the Green economists who believe that ecologically sustainable development is practical and possible to achieve.

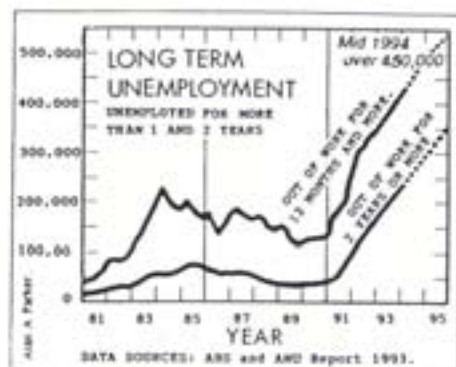
Urban bikeway networks are important future components of any sustainable transport system and a key element in moving away from the current wasteful and unsustainable transport system. The bicycle movement has to use every opportunity to get them built and now is the time for a major lobbying effort before the current government loses power. The institutional mechanisms must be set in place.

"It was done before, and it can be done again"

My idea is to "fast track" the building of bikeway networks and provide work mostly for the long term unemployed. Most of the funds would be used for building bikeways, with small grants to set up bikeway planning teams at state level to assist local councils without the resources to survey and design bikeways and to negotiate land purchase.

Building bikeways is very labour intensive and could employ a lot of people quickly — around 12,000 semi-skilled long term unemployed workers. Otherwise, the high profit/low job recovery will lead to a social disaster as shown in the graph.

In 1984 the Commonwealth Employment Program (CEP) included 380 small bikeway projects costing \$28 million and employing 3,500 people, identifying a lot of good councils to implement such works. It should work even better the second time around.



What needs to be built largely exists as lines on bikeway network maps in local government bike plans. The job is to design the bikeways and put them on the ground.

In 1984 when a 4-person team was set up by the Victorian Ministry for Transport to assist local councils to spend \$2m, it ensured that the \$2m was spent on what really needed to be done. I was the bike planner and draftsman working with a manager, civil engineer and a typist, and that proved to me what can be done. Several such teams need to be set up with job creation by state bicycle committees.

The photographs of the northern cycleway from Wollongong illustrate what was done in 1985/86 with CEP funds by Wollongong City Council. The bikeway runs along 5 km of interesting coastline, with seven bike/pedestrian bridges across rivers and creeks, opening up a continuous route linking several suburbs.

Job creation: a historical perspective

Economic rationalists in government have not only put a million people out of work, they have wiped out thousands of

manufacturing companies by letting imports flood into the country. According to the Australian Institute of Criminology, unemployment-generated crime will in turn create problems years from now with serious crime levels much higher than today.

Australian cities are some of the best in the world in which to live but rising crime levels create negative perceptions of personal safety and security which are not good for cycling. There is a productive economic opportunity here that we are failing miserably to take advantage of. When one million brains and pairs of hands are idle, it merely creates a breeding ground for the dark side of private enterprise, when what we should be doing is turning the problem around to build better cities. Building bikeways is not the only thing that should be done, far from it, but it is a step in the right direction. Fortunately, not all economists are economic rationalists, indeed, the last few years has convinced many Australians that what they stand for is not rational, socially equitable nor ecologically sustainable. Fortunately, the rationalists' overriding influence in Canberra may be on the decline.

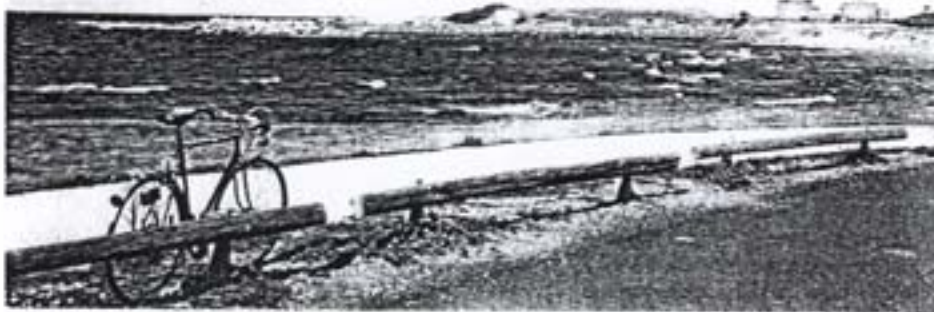
Economists of a Keynesian disposition are now being listened to — it will be years before the Green economists in favour of a conserver society and environmentally sustainable development gain much influence. Keynes' ideas formed the basis of full employment in postwar Europe, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. One of Keynes' disciples was prime minister Ben Chifley who had to make Australia industrially self-sufficient and find work for 500,000 returning Australian soldiers after WWII. This he did and Robert Menzies consolidated those achievements. Despite their difference, they were both national builders and Keynes lives on in their achievement.

I draw this historical parallel because of another similarity to 1944. Australia's national debt was as bad as it is today as a percentage of GDP and Keynes' thinking helped Chifley and Menzies to reduce it. Today jobs have to be found for 500,000 long-term unemployed and our national debt of \$180 billion has to be reduced. The only thing we know for certain is that it was the advice of economic rationalists which brought us this mess. Bicycle transportation can reduce car and fuel imports and reduce wasteful use of cars, so we can see we are part of the solution. I make no apology for proposing a Keynesian approach to bicycle planning and provision.

Bikeways, depressions, and design of livable cities

In livable cities, we need close-knit bikeway networks for the most efficient and environmentally sound form of transport ever invented. The future threat of resource

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Proposal to the PM's Committee on Employment Opportunities

On behalf of the Town & Country Planning Association (Vic), the Bicycle Federation of Australia, the Bicycle Industry Traders Association and the Retail Cycle Traders of Australia, Alan Parker put two proposals to the Employment Opportunities Committee.

THE PROPOSALS were designed to assist the committee's central aims of maximum sustainable economic growth and reducing the number of long-term unemployed. The proposals are also ecologically sustainable and would implement a key part of the government ESD and Greenhouse Strategies, the National Bicycle Strategy.

The submission asked for \$100 million to be set aside to build bikeways over the next three years and that, to ensure road authorities build bicycle-safe roads, funds are tied to bicycle facilities so they cannot be channelled into anything else.

1994/95 budget proposal

1. \$34 million tied grants to local government for building bikeways. Mainly off-road facilities.
2. Provide the means to implement the National Bicycle Strategy. Establish a Federal Office of Bicycle Transport, with an annual budget of \$2m for projects and research of national significance and for 1% of the road funding allocated to each state to be tied for provision of bicycle facilities on roads by the road construction authorities.

Labour intensive projects with high benefit/

cost ratios like bikeways, and bicycle facilities generally, should be funded out of government revenue because the environmental externalities of the projects are positive. According to the Industry Commission, if benefit/cost analysis was applied properly in assessing transport proposals, there would be no problem with bicycle projects, however, this has rarely happened in the past. In any least-cost planning approach to passenger transport, bicycle facilities will receive priority. The problem is that least-cost planning has never been applied to transport projects in Australia.

These bikeway projects are so labour intensive that the unemployment benefits saved, plus the long-term hidden benefits, means they quickly pay for themselves. They are "no regrets options" that can be rapidly acted upon.

Bikeway networks should be regarded as an essential part of the transport infrastructure and formal recognition by Cabinet of the need for this infrastructure in all cities is essential. Cyclists have been discriminated against since the 1940s until very recently, so building bikeways will help redress previous wrongs while providing jobs.

depletion, land degradation, pollution of the air, ground and sea, the thinning of our atmospheric UV-shield and the threat of climate change is now recognised. In civilised countries there is also a commitment to provide work for all who want it. Now is the time to persevere with the demand for funds for bicycle facilities. If there is going to be any future, we must be part of it.

About 15 years ago, I talked to Eric Claxton OBE, an important English bicycle/pedestrian planning advocate of the '60s and '70s. He had designed the New Town of Stevenage which was special because of its separate bikeway network. The 1950s was a time of growing prosperity when most city engineers thought the bicycle totally redundant as transport, so I wanted to know why the network was built. I knew it wasn't a government-inspired initiative.

Eric told me he built the bikeways because he had lived through the great depression and he knew there would be another one, so there would be a real need to have safe and cheap transport. Cities have a design life of centuries and should be planned for the long term. Of course, he said, the transport bureaucracy didn't see it that way.

Bikeway networks are a means of providing transport equity for future generations. Equity means there must be bikeways and cities



Workers lay tarmac on the Moonee Ponds bike path, Victoria, in 1985

should be designed around human-powered transport. Thirty years before the buzz-term ESD was coined, Eric Claxton had the concept

of "inter-generational equity" firmly in his brain and now we, too, need to build it into our thinking.