



The Industry Commission report

...the *good* news and the *bad* news

by ALAN PARKER

THE INDUSTRY Commission (IC) Report on Urban Transport will significantly influence the future of transport planning in Australia, especially given the recent move by the Australian Transport Committee to develop a co-ordinated national transport policy.

Some good news is that the IC report is peppered with quotations from cycling organisations and the six recommendations in the joint submission by the Bicycle Federation of Australia, Town and Country Planning Association, Bicycle Industry and Traders Association and the Bicycle Retailers (*Cyclist*, February—March) are printed in full. An 11-page chapter, much more comprehensive than in the interim report, is specifically devoted to the needs of cyclists.

The Commission's two key bicycling recommendations are as follows:

— application of cost benefit analysis to

all transport investment decision making, incorporating the full range of alternatives.

— full consideration be given to the potential role of cycling in transport and urban planning.

The first should ensure transport decisions maximise community benefits such as improved accessibility, mobility and safety for cyclists in the most cost-effective and environmentally sound way. The second should result in consideration of cyclists' needs in developments such as roads, transport interchanges, residential subdivisions, educational institutions, city shopping precincts, and suburban retail centres.

The difference between these recommendations and those in the interim report is that cycling earns a mention and cyclists' needs are no longer mixed up with those of pedestrians.

These excellent recommendations, if acted upon, are likely to result in a much higher level of funding for bicycle facilities than our recommended one per cent of road funding. The commissioners seemed peeved that so few of the cyclists giving evidence appreciated that the above recommendations were a better way of winning funds from government departments who now routinely use economists to do cost/benefit studies. Making cycling part of the process of economic evaluation and mainstream transport planning is better than outright funding in the form of quotas. This will only happen, however, with an injection of national resources, as embodied in the Netherlands Master Bike Plan, to develop the techniques for integrating provision for cycling. At present, a number of transport agencies have a poor record on this and, more generally, on taking account of "externalities", such as social and environmental costs and benefits of transport modes.

As the package of measures favoured by the IC, "Reform: an Integrated Approach", is the most important part of the report. It states, "Australia's urban transport systems are falling far short of their potential contribution to the economic and social well being of our cities. There are no 'quick fixes' available." It then goes on, in the section, "Starting the Reform Process", to state (p. 274),

"The needs of cyclists and pedestrians should be given higher priority in transport planning. Speedy implementation of the National Bicycle Strategy would go a long way to enhancing the role of what are, after all, the only non-polluting modes. There is a need to translate agreed principles into action such as increasing the number of bicycle storage facilities at train stations."

Other general recommendations which will benefit cyclists are listed in the section, "Priorities for Reform". The following two of its six items are important for cyclists (p. 268):

- giving the institutions involved in urban transport planning well defined objectives; and
- creating a cleaner environment.

The first of these will enable specific objectives to be added to the National Bicycle Strategy, which is in need of the kind of specific objectives in the Netherlands Bicycle Master Plan. The Netherlands Plan (which has the strength of being part of the overall National Environment Plan) has a specific objective of increasing bicycle journeys by 30%. It pays specific attention to providing more bicycle short cuts and direct routes in urban areas with high congestion costs.

Coming to the carefully worded second IC priority, it is important to note the concern with "dirty" air pollutants while still ignoring the "clean" carbon dioxide emissions which contribute to global warming.

When you consider the limited environmental perspective of the Industry Commission and the failure of the bicycle movement to present hard economic

arguments for cycling, cyclists have done very well from the report.

Generally the report is also an excellent data source. Unfortunately, there is a misleading table (p. 261), about the safety of cycling using six-year-old data provided by the Federal Office of Road Safety. This appears in the chapter on cycling and overstates the safety problem. The figures in the IC report against the most recent 1993 figures are shown below.

Fatality rates per million vehicle km

Vehicle	1988	1993
car	0.9	0.7
bicycle	4.7	1.9

Cycling has become measurably safer. There were 87 fatalities in 1988 compared to 45 in 1993, despite an increase in the number of bicycle kilometres travelled from 1.95 billion km in 1988 to 2.4 billion km in 1993. With an estimated increase in the Australian bicycle fleet from 4.2 million in 1988 to 4.6 million in 1993, the bicycle fatality rate per 100 million bicycle km in 1993 is now much lower than in most other countries and the same as the Netherlands death rate. Bicycle fatality rates have been dropping faster than car fatality rates and are now one-seventh what they were in 1970 in terms of exposure per kilometre.

The Federal Office of Road Safety's misuse of data to deter cycling is completely irresponsible. In Australian capital cities the bicycle is needed for sustainable mobility. It

can replace two-fifths of the 40% or so of car trips lasting less than 10 minutes and enlarge the catchment area of trunk public transport routes. Using the same amount of human effort, the bicycle travels three times the distance and accesses ten times the area walking does.

Mass use of bicycles as a means of public transport access is the only practical way to make public transport work in a very low density urban environment. The IC support for bicycle access to rail and much needed storage facilities is therefore a welcome development.

It must be said that the IC report ignores ecologically unsustainable trends in Australian transport. This is an issue of public concern. Polls clearly show Australians, despite unemployment woes, want action on both local and global environmental issues.

Unsustainable transport trends in Australia

The IC Report fails to recognise that bicycling can be as important as public transport in Australia's capital cities.

The report contains no trend-breaking recommendations that will stabilise CO₂ emissions, let alone reduce them as Australia promised when it ratified the international convention on climate change. Indeed, greenhouse emissions from passenger transport may rise by 20%! The climate change convention refers specifically to encouraging high occupancy transport, walking and cycling.

There is nothing in the Report to arrest the decline of public transport nor to address pedestrian needs specifically. The only radical proposal, and for this the IC deserves credit, is introduction of electronic road pricing in severely congested areas. At best, this will only slow unsustainable transport trends. By contrast, the Netherlands will soon apply road pricing as part of a comprehensive package of measures designed to stabilise per capita distance travelled at 1986 levels and meet car travel needs with a smaller fleet of more energy-efficient, less polluting cars made from recyclable materials. In its Bicycle Master Plan, the Netherlands displays a clever "horses for courses" approach, using bicycles to help improve the efficiency of both road and rail systems. It contributes to a flexible and balanced transport system such as can never be achieved while cars dominate.

Many Australians are concerned about being locked into using cars they know are polluting with no alternative means of transport available. They are aware that spaceship Earth is one vehicle we all travel on together and it has to be maintained and kept in good condition for generations to come. People therefore support Australia being a signatory to the climate change convention. Yet neither the IC nor the government is taking a lead in providing people with an ecologically sustainable transport system and honouring our international obligations.