

Towards a National Bicycle Committee

The Hawke Federal came to power with a policy positive towards the needs of bicycle users. The Bicycle Federation believes that the Feds need to set up a national co-ordinating body as an essential means of implementing that policy. Bicycle advocate Alan Parker outlines the cyclists proposals.

The Bicycle Federation of Australia is trying to persuade the Federal Office of Road Safety of the need to set up a National Bicycle Committee (NBC).

The long term goal of the NBC would be to ensure that the Commonwealth would do what it ought to and can do, to look after Australia's 3½ million cyclists, over the next ten years. In the short term it would provide a medium for interstate liaison and ensuring that the best statewide programs were adopted in other states.

Simplistic Policies a Constraint to be Overcome

State and Commonwealth Governments seem to be preoccupied with the negative aspect of bicycle accidents, and simplistic solutions such as compulsory bicycle helmet wearing. The BFA must ensure that government properly considers those measures that prevent accidents from happening in the first place by changing poorly conceived safety policies and ensure that the positive contributions of bicycling as a means of transport recreation and touring are also given proper consideration.

If the NBC is going to benefit Australia, we have to sell Governments on the benefits of cycling; to conserve liquid fuels, reduce air pollution and noise levels, and increase the physical fitness and health of the population.

We can see that in countries such as Holland and Japan that bicycles are not only used in for recreation, but make a major contribution to the efficient operation of the country's economy as a low-cost means of transport. The energy efficient bicycle can make a similar contribution to our economy, given adequate funding and planning. However, the first task is to

demolish the myth that cycling is inherently dangerous; put about by some government agencies who use the myth as an excuse for not doing anything that promotes or encourages bicycle use.

Bicycle Use is Increasing and the Fatality Rate is Falling Here and Elsewhere

Cycling is becoming safer and the fatal accident rate per unit of population has fallen over the last twenty years. Bicycle use in Australia has been steadily increasing since the early 70's, and the bicycle fatality rate per unit of population is now at the same level as the early seventies.

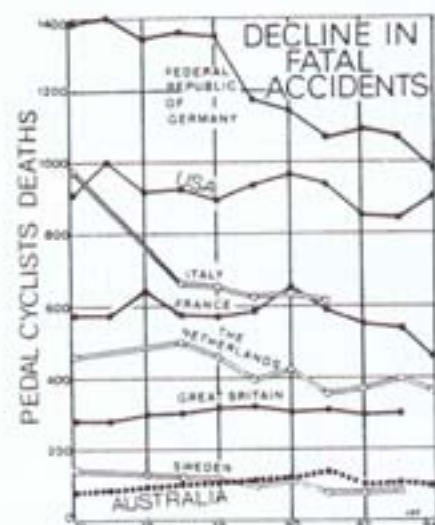
Australian bicycle sales have increased dramatically over the past ten years, and there has been no significant increase in fatalities.

Some government agencies have stated that the number of recorded non-fatal accidents have increased, but this is not a real increase; merely that more minor accidents are reported than before, due to improvements in the accident reporting system. It therefore follows that as the fatality rate per 1,000 person population remains fairly constant, there is no objective reason for us to go along with safety issues as the only major issue of concern. Safety does concern the BFA, because the cycling death rate is not dropping as fast as it is for motor vehicle users; but this is not a sufficient reason to bias the work of the NBC exclusively toward safety over the next decade.

Overcoming the Safety Backlog in the Short Term

To bring the bicyclist fatality rate down in line with the recent reduction in motor vehicle fatality rates, the Commonwealth will have to do much

more. The BFA's concern is to catch up and overcome the backlog of previous neglect, and this will require some expensive safety research. For example, in depth bicycle accident studies are urgently required like those conducted in the United States (Cross, K.D. 1978). As this kind of



The comparative fatality rates shown above show that the fatal bicycle accident rate figures have dropped in Australia over the last 20 years, but are significantly higher than in the US and Britain. The overall improvement in the death rate per 100,000 population is due to overall improvements in the road safety support system provided for all road users. The slight increase in the figure below in the absolute number of Australian cyclists killed is due to the large increase in bicycle users, and an 8% population growth rate compared to approximately 1% growth in Europe.

1. Road Research - Safety of Two Wheelers - OECD March 1978
2. Cycle and Light powered Two Wheelers Accidents EENC, September 1984
3. Fatal Accident Reporting System, NHTSA US Dept. of Transport 1983
4. Australian Bureau of Statistics, Compiled from several documents.

research is too expensive (\$300,000) for State Governments to undertake and of national significance, the Federal Office of Road Safety (Mr Morris' portfolio needs to commission such indepth studies.

Recent data of bicycle accidents in poor lighting conditions also need to be the subject of some indepth research, as these are responsible for nearly half the adult fatalities. Product safety studies on bicycle lighting, braking systems and bicycle helmet ventilation are other worthwhile areas of research for the Commonwealth.

Federal Government Support for Cycling in the United States of America

Overseas, some cyclist/bureaucrats and cycling lobbyists have been very successful in selling the benefits of cycling to the government. It would be wise for the Commonwealth to consider positive overseas examples. The United States Environmental Protection Agency has some practical ideas on the use of bicycles to reduce air pollution (caused mainly by motor vehicles' exhaust fumes) which is also a major problem in state capital cities of Australia. A six year old report states:

Increasing bicycle use has obvious appeal as an air quality measure for several reasons. First, since trips made by bicycles do not result in hazardous emissions, every bicycle trip which substitutes for auto travel results in cleaner air. Bicycle strategies generally appear to be among the most popular transportation measures, when instituted. This is not surprising since many riders say a major motivation for using a bicycle is for enjoyment, and because bicycle riding provides an opportunity for physical exercise at the same time a trip is made. Other appealing features of bicycle strategies, include energy conservation through reduced demand for gasoline. In addition to conservation, bicycle riders save money they would otherwise pay for gas. Finally, in some situations, such as congested downtown areas, bicycle travel is faster than car travel. (US EPA 1979).

Similar studies have been made in West Germany and there is a need for a national bicycle study to be made in Australia and for Minister Morris to have his Bureau of Transport Economics undertake this work.

Bicycle Federation of Australia Short List of Cyclists' Priorities

The Bicycle Federation of Australia can credibly argue that it represents all non-competitive cyclists. Member groups that constitute the Bicycle Federation of Australia are primarily community groups that directly repre-

sent adult non-competitive cyclists, but also speak indirectly for the great majority of cyclists, and try as best they can to represent the interests of child cyclists. Nearly all BFA cycling groups are represented on the State Bicycle Committees, and are heavily involved in their decision-making processes. The following list is what the Commonwealth could do in broad principles, it is derived from the experience gained by cycling representatives working with their State Bicycle Committees.

Overall Planning Philosophy

Accept the fact that cyclists mostly use roads and adopt the "integrated approach" to bicycle planning, which is widely accepted in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. The integrated approach is summarised in the mnemonic of the 4 E's, that is — Engineering, Education, Enforcement and Encouragement. The key to bicycle safety lies in improvements to the existing road system, and improving the behaviour of all road users, especially if more recreational paths are built, which encourage bicycle riding and will as a consequence generate bicycle traffic on the rest of the road system. The bicycle paths that are of most use to utility cyclists are those that either provide "short cuts" or bridge barriers to give continuous routes on low traffic volume streets, or bypass "pinch points" and dangerously narrow kerbside lanes on main roads. In other words, the main purpose of bicycle paths is to better enable cyclists to use the existing road system, which has cost billions to construct and maintain, and to which cyclists have legal rights of access.

Organisation and Funding

Establish a properly constituted National Bicycle Committee (NBC) in Canberra, whose Chairperson reports directly to the Minister for Transport. The NBC would be provided with adequate support services as a standing committee of government, and a budget of \$1 million per annum to fund bicycle projects and research of national significance.

Bicycle Service Organisations

The Commonwealth should recognise the need to help cyclists to help themselves, by assisting the organisations that would encourage more people to cycle, provide insurance, legal aid, touring advice and generally represent the interests of cyclists to all levels of government.

For a few years, the BFA will need some financial assistance with travel expenses if it is to properly par-

ticipate in the decision-making processes of a National Bicycle Committee.

The Commonwealth's Enforcement Role

To encourage the Australian Institute of Criminology and the Australian Road Research Board to do the necessary research.

Overseas evidence is available to show the need to more rigorously enforce traffic laws, so as to remove dangerous drivers from the roads.

A road safety support system that is weak on law enforcement increases the risk of accidents for all road users, but is many times more dangerous for the unprotected bicyclists, particularly children. Knowing them, the BFA's policy is to promote the development of a legal/enforcement system that provides bicyclists with proper legal and police protection as vulnerable road users.

The Commonwealth's Educational Role

Accept as a matter of faith that the safe child cyclist of today is going to be the safe motorist of tomorrow, and develop statewide bicycle safety and education programs for children of all ages. The BFA advocates that a traffic safety education system develops, which, in the long term, will improve the on-road behaviour of all road users.

An on-going program of random breath testing coupled with the gradual introduction of a bicycle-oriented system of traffic safety education is the way to keep pushing the fatality rate down. Now that safety belts have been provided in cars, the design of cars and our roads have been greatly improved, and the number of road deaths in Australia has declined to what it was in 1958, we should be developing a traffic safety education system that will reduce the 2,768 deaths in 1983 to less than 2,000 by the year 2000, no matter what increase in the population. The BFA would like to see the appropriate Commonwealth departments involved in traffic safety and for the NBC to act as catalysts in the traffic safety education field.

Commonwealth's Encouragement Role

There is a need to provide adequate funding so as to encourage bicycle commuting and utility cycling in general by developing adult cycling/fitness programs in conjunction with the Commonwealth Ministry for Sport & Recreation and/or the Commonwealth Health Commission.

The most suitable course for this purpose (HAHN. S.S. 1983) was

developed by an American educational innovator and expert cyclist, John Forester, Forester's "Effective Cycling Course."

It is recommended that this course be developed by a Commonwealth agency for the purpose of adoption nationwide. A unique Australian course that fulfills the same function would be equally effective.

Perhaps the most important Commonwealth Encouragement role is to involve other agencies, and to ensure that the best planning and implementation measures developed by particular states are adopted by others.

Commonwealth's Engineering Role

One of the major problems facing all cyclists today is the appalling conditions of many main roads. A major physical constraint to the growth of adult bicycle usage is the lack of bicycle safety features on main roads, especially on roads with high speed, heavy vehicles, and narrow kerbside lanes or kerbside lanes with dangerous shoulders and broken edges. Main road intersections with high speed left turning lanes or slip roads are especially dangerous.

What can be done on main roads in Australia for cyclists can be experienced today in California. In California, the main road authority has developed cost-effective ways of catering for bicycle traffic that are detailed in the California Highway Design Manual (CALTRANS 1982). In

particular, the provision of 3,500 kilometres of sealed shoulders on rural roads and rural type roads in urban areas has greatly encouraged adult bicycle usage in California, particularly bicycle touring on inter-city highways. The opening of 1,500 kilometres of sealed freeway safety lanes for use by cyclists has also benefited cyclists greatly.

Full-depth sealed shoulders are economical because over a ten year period, they pay for themselves in reduced road edge maintenance. It is well known that trucks do most damage to roads, and having trucks' wheels running two metres away from the edge prevents the edges breaking up.

We would require Minister Morris' Ministry to provide additional funds to the Australian Road Research Board to do the following.

- Make a comparative study of Victorian and Californian road conditions and the potential economic savings of providing full-depth and other forms of sealed shoulder treatments in Australia.
- Establish technical, legal and safety guidelines for opening freeways for cyclists.

The basic problem again is the simplistic attitudes of Australia-wide and state road building agencies that deny cyclists their legitimate rights of access to the road which is right and proper, given the bicycle's status as a road vehicle in Common and Statute Law.

State agencies that are responsible for regulating the introduction of traffic management schemes, also discriminate against cyclist and ignore the safety needs of child cyclists. There is a need to ensure that local area traffic management devices are subject to design standards that allow cyclists convenient and legal access to roads that are modified to block or reduce motor traffic, or reduce the speed of motor vehicles.

So far the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB) and State traffic authorities have ignored cyclists' needs and approve installations that discriminate against the needs of cyclists, particularly local child cyclists.

Other Issues of Concern

The BFA notes with some concern that there is no statement of the need to do any of the following, in Commonwealth transport policy:

- To evaluate the implementation of metropolitan and local area bicycle plans that have been completed and are of special merit. To evaluate other bicycle planning studies of national significance that have been implemented.
- To provide research funding for the preparation of national design and planning guidelines for bicycle planning, facility design, route mapping and the provision of secure bicycle parking facilities. Badly designed bicycle paths built with



According to the ARRB there are over 50 different traffic management devices and many of these need to be modified to allow cyclists legal access through them. Priority treatments are also important to protect low stress bicycle routes, as they are in the United Kingdom, as shown in the photograph. Sometimes space limitations will not allow some of these devices to be modified, however, many of the devices this writer has inspected could have been modified as

shown. Most of these devices installed to date make no provision for cyclists.

Road closures narrowed exits and entries can easily be modified to allow the safe and legal passage of bicycles. Fourway intersection treatments really slow cars down in the residential street grid and are accepted in nearly all American States. Entry control signs, with exception plates for bicycles like the contra-flow bike lanes have proved successful in the UK. Low and medium stress

route networks, that heavily utilize the residential street system have been recommended in the Bikeplans for Newcastle, Geelong, Adelaide, Melbourne and Perth, but no adequate guide exists on how best to protect these cycle routes. The Commonwealth has a role in ensuring that in any future work the ARRB does on local area traffic management, cyclists needs are taken into account. Photos: Courtesy of Greater London Council

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JOLORS and CEP funding are the norm and not the exception in Australia, and bicycle path design and construction standards are urgently required.

- to provide research funding to show how bike/train bike/express-bus and bike/ferry trips can substitute for long urban car trips. The Australian Railway Research & Development Organisation (ARRDO) needs to receive additional funding from Minister Morris' Ministry for this purpose.
- To encourage state and local planning agencies to assist builders, architects, developers, owners and managers of buildings, commercial and shopping complexes to provide secure storage facilities for cyclists. Develop and model planning ordinances to ensure the long term provision of storage facilities are provided as a matter of normal procedure throughout Australia.

Conclusion

Over the next decade there is a lot that can be done to preserve cyclists' rights of access, to improve the road behaviour of all road users and to improve the road environment on which

cyclists will continue to do most of their cycling no matter how many bicycle paths are built.

The Bicycle Federation of Australia which initiated the proposal for a National Bicycle Committee (NBC) would like the Federal Minister for Transport to announce the formation of the NBC at the Bicycle Planning Conference in March 1986. Cyclists would then have a properly constituted means of communication with the Commonwealth on all matters of national significance.

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