

Bikes are part of urban transport, says Industry Commission

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ACCORDING to a recent report by the Industry Commission, bicycles should be considered in transport and planning decisions, but cyclists need to prove that any expenditure is justified.

These comments are tucked right at the back of a huge report on urban transport. The commission received 200 submissions, including some from BFA groups in NSW, Victoria, Tasmania, SA and WA. The conservative report rejects the idea that our cities should be compact, with more public transport, as in Europe. It says Australians prefer more living space, with the inevitable consequence of car-dominated urban sprawl. The report says that urban travel systems should be more efficient. The amounts spent on public transport do not effectively meet the needs of the "transport-disadvantaged" i.e. those who do not drive cars. The commission says that transport-generated pollution should be reduced, but avoids the obvious solution of increasing petrol prices to European levels. Instead it proposes complex electronic "road pricing" of vehicles entering congested zones.

When it finally considers walking and cycling, the report is dismissive. It says that most bicycle riding is recreational (true, but there is still lots of utility cycling), mostly by kids (wrong: most bicycle riding is now by adults, with kids riding bikes less), and that bicycles are used lots in Holland because it's flat and the Dutch have always ridden them (wrong: bicycle riding is important in Holland because the Dutch government spends a significant proportion of its transport budget on bicycle facilities and on discouraging car use. And many Dutch cities are on hills).

The report's conclusion that bicycle facilities should be considered in transport planning is merely rhetorical, because it does not spell out what that means — at least 1% of Federal, State and municipal transport budgets. Its other comment that cost benefit analysis of cycling is needed should be taken more seriously. The Sydney Bikeplan did such an analysis, and so did the British Medical Association — see their book, *Cycling for Health and Safety*, in BINSW's mail order list. We need a credible economist who can rework these arguments, converting our starry-eyed claims about cycling into dollars the Australian community can save by riding bikes more.

—Ron Shepherd

IC report is "eco-treason"

The Industry Commission's interim report on urban transport is, in the words of Paul Mees of the Public Transport Users Association, "a political document proposing ideologically based formulae of privatisation, deregulation and corporatisation, that bears almost no relationship to the evidence presented to them." The report glosses over evidence presented by conservation, bicycle and transport groups.

The IC has missed opportunities, identified by these groups, to encourage public transport and its integration with bicycle transport, through link-ups to trains and express bus services. It has failed to give any practical impetus to the National Bicycle Strategy and to address deterrents to cycling raised in submissions, such as the massive \$30 million a year bike theft problem. It has ignored substantial evidence of the success of pro-public transport and bicycle policies overseas.

The IC package of recommendations if implemented would be ecologically unsustainable in the long term and undermine Australia's credibility as a signatory of the conventions signed in Rio de Janeiro. As the fifth nation to sign the International Convention on Climate Change, Australia made a proud commitment to stem the 40,000 tonnes-per-minute flow of greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. The commitment of other nations, such as the Netherlands, to their convention obligations, is reflected in national environmental and transport policy. Meanwhile, the recommendations contained in the IC report would downgrade all but private road transport and thus subvert ESD and Greenhouse strategies. Recommendations for road pricing and parking restrictions are its sole gestures to addressing traffic congestion and pollution.

The IC fills a void in preparing the report but, with its disrespect for national environmental goals, is not the appropriate body for the task. The IC report needs to be rejected by government and the role of recommending policy on urban transport passed over to a more expert team, including key members of the ESD working group. Recommendations on urban transport need to fulfil directions set in the ESD strategy by promoting major shifts to public transport, creative use of bicycle transport and new urban design which is sympathetic to public and non-motorised transport.

—Alan Parker