

Oz economy can **BENEFIT** from Greenhouse actions

by Alan Parker

THE Bicycle Federation of Australia has strongly condemned a revision of Australia's Greenhouse and Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) strategies. The revised document fails to recommend ongoing Commonwealth funding for bicycle infrastructure to encourage cycling. Commonwealth and state governments need to stop ignoring and start embracing world best practice for ESD and provision for cyclists.

As most cyclists would know, cycling has a small but significant role in reducing the carbon dioxide emissions that cause global warming. Australia's bicycle fleet of six million replaces around one billion short car trips each year, these being the most inefficient and polluting use of cars. The global "Agenda 21" identifies the need to create bicycle friendly local environments:

"Transportation strategies should reduce the need for motor vehicles by favouring high occupancy public transport and providing safe bicycle- and foot-paths. Municipalities need to be developed in ways that reduce the need for long distance commuting... Sound management is needed to prevent urban sprawl onto agricultural land and environmentally fragile regions."

This article considers the latest on global warming and how a green transport focus could benefit our economy.

Australia: world's greatest GHG producer

Man-made global warming is real and all nations must act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs). Some – like Australia with its huge renewable and non-renewable energy resources – have a greater responsibility than others. Per person, Australia is the third most prolific producer of carbon dioxide, behind the USA and Canada. If we count in greenhouse gases from agriculture and deforestation, Australians are the worst greenhouse polluters on the planet.

In Australia and the US, motor cars will continue to be second only to power stations in emitting CO₂, as gains in engine efficiency are swallowed by sheer numbers of cars. Countries with the highest emissions have lowest bicycle use, while high bicycle use countries like the Netherlands and

Japan have lower per capita emissions. Over the last 30 years, these countries recognised funding of bicycle infrastructure as an important investment and an integral part of sustainable transport systems.

Fortunately, surveys show that over two-thirds of Australians want action on GHGs and the environment generally. This is why the Commonwealth government was among the first to sign the Climate Change Treaty. However, since 1992, performance of all Australian governments on Greenhouse and ESD has varied from poor to abysmal, says the Australian Conservation Foundation (Kinrade, 1995).

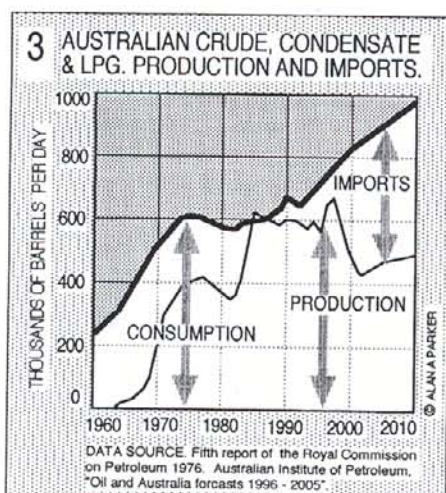
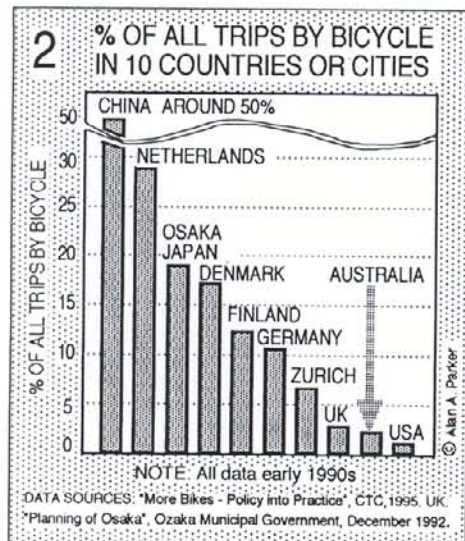
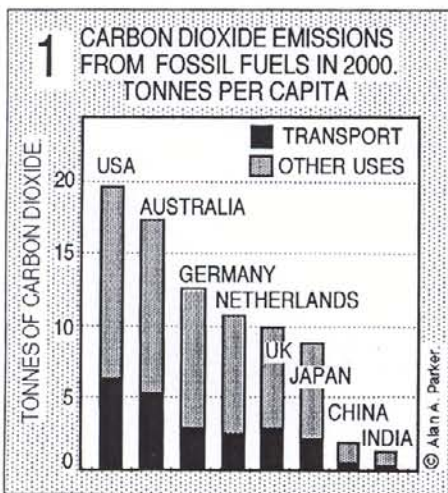
At national level, the Hawke and Keating governments did too little. The Howard government plans to do even less and has retrenched hundreds of staff knowledgeable in environmental science, road safety and transport. Howard is taking the advice of the same economic rationalists who have sabotaged environmental planning. Their assumption is that the least resource-efficient mode – the single occupant car – should continue to dominate urban transport while the bicycle receives barely token attention. Only recently in Perth do we see any real effort to match the need.

The scientific consensus on global warming

The Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has released an authoritative statement about what governments should be doing. The 1800-page report was written by 2000 scientists and technical experts from some 130 countries. It will shortly be published by Cambridge University Press and is also on the IPCC Internet site <<http://www.unep.ch/ipcc/ipcc95.html>>. The IPCC anticipates slow climate change but recognises the possibility of "climatic surprises" – a sudden switch into a new set of climatic conditions with unknown consequences. The IPCC is effectively telling governments that the air-conditioning system and waste-recycling system on spaceship Earth urgently needs a preventative maintenance program.

Tunnel-vision's economic impact

A "green" transport system makes long term economic sense but our elected representatives



are ruled by short term, market driven, tunnel vision. Their mistakes will result in a disastrous balance of payments problem due to exploding imports.

By 2000 there will be a \$4 billion a year oil import bill and worse to follow in balance of payments due to the reduction in tariff protection for the car industry. Australia needs an energy efficient "green" car made by a protected Australian industry, as well as lifestyle and infrastructure provisions that make reduced car use feasible. If car imports were restricted, our car industry could produce "green" and solar cars and we would have a more efficiently used car fleet, no loss of jobs, reduced petrol imports and reduced GHGs.

This would complement planning of Australian cities to reduce the need for personalised motor transport. Work, leisure and shopping should be accessible by walking, cycling or public transport. Local shopping centres close to public transport need to be built up and urban villages created within these localities.

The bicycle movement needs to recognise the need to promote broad concepts of sustainable cities, sustainable transport systems and energy efficient vehicles as the context for the bicycle. It makes no sense to advocate the bicycle in splendid isolation. Conversely non-cycling environmentalists and public transport advocates need to realise that you cannot have ESD and minimise human damage to the environment without a transport system that makes heavy use of bicycles. Coping with the urban sprawl produced by 30 years of mass driving with walking and public transport alone is a fantasy. We can make Australia's sprawling cities sustainable by recognising the ergonomic advantage of bicycling over walking which would enable the bicycle to replace many car trips in middle and outer suburbia. Australia has only to learn the lessons from other countries.

The need to lobby parliamentarians

Many Australians want to amend their unsustainable style of living and could use bicycles much more if better facilities were provided as part of a GHG reduction package. The ways to promote higher levels

of bicycle use are now well established overseas and Australia can confidently follow world best practice (Parker, 1995). The "revision" of the Greenhouse Strategy threatens to be a watering down exercise, affording even more excuses to ignore our Climate Treaty commitment (ACF, 1996). So far only the Australian Democrat Senators have shown willingness to direct Commonwealth funding for bicycle facilities. No progress has been made at all with the Coalition. The bicycle movement must pressure government to embrace Greenhouse policies that encourage cycling. Now is the time for cycling groups and individuals to conduct a concerted letter-writing campaign aimed at Federal Ministers.

Note: Copies of the BFA submission on greenhouse gas emissions are available from the Bicycle New South Wales Campaigns Coordinator, Eva Gerencer for \$5. Enquiries to (02) 9283 5200.

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