

RIGHTS OF ACCESS

Bicycle facilities

The battle for access to our safest roads continues

by ALAN PARKER

IN the last ten years cyclists have been banned from most new major bridges and freeways in Australia and have been condemned to travel many kilometres out of their way on roads that are unsafe. It is appalling that ten years after the release of the Geelong Bikeplan, which recommended the practical technique of widening kerb lanes to give cyclists more room, that there are less than half of one percent of main roads with widened kerb lanes.

The loss of cyclists access to major bridges such as the Westgate bridge in Melbourne and the Gateway bridge in Brisbane is far more damaging than anything else and is not compensated by any of the improvements governments have made in other areas. All over Australia bicycle users have about 700 km of off-road paths shared with joggers and pedestrians, some bicycle education programs in the schools and a few bicycle route maps. These gains do not outweigh the losses and there is a legitimate cause for complaint about the State Bicycle Committees of NSW and Victoria and the Queensland Bicycle Advisory Committee who have all failed to effectively represent cyclists interests to the appropriate highway authorities.

For many years the majority of bureaucrats on the so called State Bicycle Committees have been undermining cyclists rights of access, and their right to have bicycle safe features built into main roads. One exception is Malcolm Heard, the Chairman of the South Australian Bicycle Committee. He has brought about significant change within

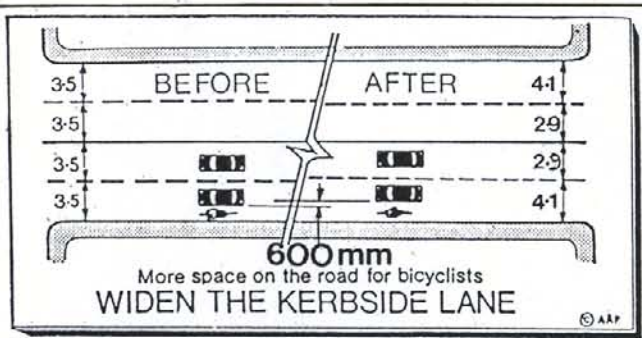
the South Australian Highways Department which has enabled bicycle safety to be built into the state road construction bureaucracy.

The basic problem elsewhere is that State Bicycle Committee's concern themselves only with what is *acceptable* to the roads bureaucracy. To date cyclists have been the losers and have been maneuvered into supporting plans and programs that serve the careers of traffic engineering bureaucrats more than the needs of cyclists.

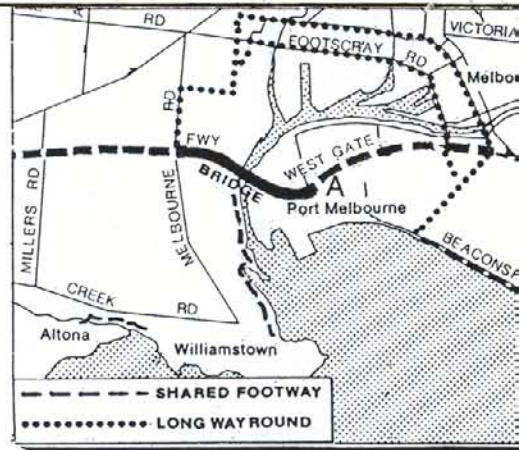
To give a concrete example from Victoria: The much praised Melbourne Bike Plan was relevant when it was written in 1981 but in 1987 is in need of revision. Next to nothing has been done to implement it's recommendations on main roads. The road engineering part of the plan is now five years out of date and there is no provision in the 1987-88 financial year to reassess cyclists needs, or to show how some freeway breakdown lanes could be used to create a viable bicycle arterial network.

In a recent brief given to consultants to prepare a bikeway design manual for Victoria there was no proper statement of what the consultants should be doing on main roads. The manual when it is finally produced will probably fail to show the practical means available to make main roads safer.

After an eventful seven years as a member of the State Bicycle Committee of Victoria which included my resignation on two separate occasions in protest at official lies and deceit, I acquired an inside view of the bureaucratic art of



Widened kerbside lane on 14 metre wide 4-lane arterial road. The ratios on 6 and 8 lane roads would be very similar. Right: The dangerous and inconvenient route cyclists presently have to travel to link the excellent cycle routes beside Port Phillip Bay. Bicycle access via the Westgate bridge would eliminate this deadly detour.



making nothing happen. The hidden value judgement behind the non-cyclist bureaucrats pretence of looking after cyclists is that we should not be on the roads at all.

What I learned is one of the basic working rules of the bureaucracy is that they don't interfere with one another's interests; they support their own departmental interests against whatever government happens to be in power.

So the problem with State Bicycle Committee's is that they are supposed to advise the Minister about what cyclists need, but that advice is resented by the senior mandarins who regard themselves as the only source of advice.

In time the mandarins, the senior departmental heads, neutralise that committee and this is why there is no way a State Bicycle Committee will ever fight for cyclists rights of access - they can't.

This is the way the game is played because the spirit of the Yes, Minister character, Sir Humphrey Appleby, stalks the corridors of power. This then is the real meaning of the Westminster tradition and it is alive and well in Australia today.

The only way around this intolerable situation is for bicycle users to insist that the responsible minister requires that all bureaucrats on State Bicycle Commit-

tees must be or have been experienced and active bicycle users. In this regard some 50 percent of all the members of existing State Bicycle Committees would need to be removed and replaced by responsible bicycle users.

As well it is vital that the Sir Humphrey Applebys not be allowed to neutralise these committees. This can only be safeguarded if the chairpersons of all State Bicycle Committees are bicycle users with a mandate from the Minister to report on cyclists needs.

The chairperson should be given the power to act independently of the government agencies represented on the State Bicycle Committee and report directly to a Minister. Officers of Transport authorities serving on these committees must be told by the Minister that their function is to give impartial advice and not to merely act as the mouthpiece of an authority.

At a Federal level the bureaucracy is even worse, because it operates behind closed doors. There is no National Bicycle Committee so you can only guess at the Federal bureaucracy's hidden agenda. Federal mandarins like Federal politicians, now recognise that more adults than children ride bikes but their response is immature as they see cyclists as a problem instead of as a solution to a

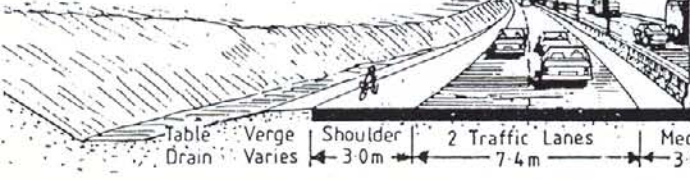
problem. What they want to do is to compel all bike riders to wear helmets.

Unfortunately, instead of providing coordination and support for cyclists, issues it looks like bicyclists will have to deal with compulsory helmet laws. Ten years ago the Federal Government was doing nothing. More recently it conducted independent studies and provided funding for employing people to create paths and shared footway programs is now at the end of the line. On-going funding for bicycle paths is still, there is no proper coordination of State activities.

Over the next decade what can be done to provide rights of access, to improve the behaviour of all road users, to improve the riding environment, to start, is it really too much to ask the government to give us two senior officers: one to be a senior coordinator to be a senior officer and the other with experience in the behavioural science or the media. The Transport Minister was trained by the Sir Humphrey Appleby. Maybe the new Minister Gareth Evans will be able to

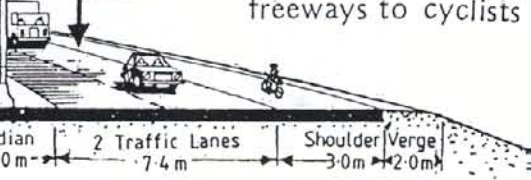
FREEWAYS

re-establish the cyclist's right to use all roads



EQUAL ACCESS IS

The emergency lane is four times wider for cyclists than a normal arterial road. California has recently opened its freeways to cyclists.



A POSSIBLE CROSS SECTION AWAY FROM INTERSECTIONS