

BICYCLIZATION

BICYCLE BOOM

There is a bicycle boom taking place in Australia. Sales for this year are about 300,000 and there has been a twenty per cent increase in bicycle sales since 1971 with an increasing number going to adults each year. This is an on-going trend that needs to be planned for and encouraged as bicycling is a non-polluting form of transportation. This article is about the need for long term planning of bicycle facilities, integrating the bicycle into the rail system and making railway stations far more accessible to people.

So far hundreds of thousands of dollars have been spent studying how the car can be integrated into the public transport system but not one cent has been spent to show how the bicycle could be so used; despite the fact that in ten years there will probably be more bicycles sold to adults each year than cars. Bicycles make it easy to move around using one's own physical effort and this simple fact should be analysed to see how it could improve the rail system. For the same physical effort a cyclist can go between 4½ times as far as a walker on flat ground and three times as far in a moderately hilly area, if the bicycle has gears. Many people do not use the railways because it is too far to walk to the station and the services are too infrequent. The mass use of bicycles could overcome both these problems in the long term, for three reasons. Firstly, many more people would be able to get to the station conveniently as is shown by the map which is based on the assumption that the cyclist will go three times as far as the walker. It was calculated that only about 15% of Melbourne's population are within half a mile or seven and a half minutes walking distance from a station, but over 85% are within seven and a half minutes cycling distance of a railway station (one and a half miles). The other interesting feature about this map is that it shows how few people are beyond twelve minutes cycling distance of a station; if you mentally push out the circular boundaries, half as much again you can easily see this, and many people who live over half a mile from a station would have good access to two railway lines, not just one.

Secondly, many people living between ¼ and ½ mile from a station would be able to get to the station so much more quickly that off-peak use of the railway by commuters would be very much encouraged. Many people who are prepared to walk about ¼ mile to catch a regular train to the city would consider too far to walk to go by train for other purposes, however, if they got into the habit of cycling to the station it might be another matter.

Thirdly, the effects of the wide use of bicycles would generate many more passengers during the peak and off-peak hours and so improve the overall efficiency of the railways, turning it into a major growth industry with all the benefits that this implies. This would allow the upgrading of services and the provision of more express lines which in turn would attract more passengers. The railway planners are aware of the large number of people beyond convenient walking distance of a station and they have made limited and highly inadequate plans to cater for them, such as increasing the existing 12,000 car parking spaces to 25,000 in five years, thereby providing for approximately 3,000 new passengers per year which is only one tenth the natural increase in population per year. Meanwhile the volume of motor traffic increases by 3% per year; it has to. The railways have no policies likely to result in more people using trains more and their cars less.

CARS DOMINATE

If public transport ever did make a real comeback the number of new passengers would be measured in hundreds and thousands per year and obviously there would not be enough parking space except for a tiny minority. Why then do they continue to promote this idea which, when coupled with the current favourable public attitude to public transport only results in idiotic situations

such as the local councils banning all day parking near Glen Waverley station? The council did this because the local streets and shopping centre parking spaces were full of commuters' cars and causing great inconvenience. We have to be realistic about cars - they take up far too much space and there is no economic way of providing for them. After all one of the great advantages of the railways is, that apart from being non-polluting, energy conserving and about twenty times safer than cars per mile travelled, they don't need the vast areas of storage space that cars do.

All that the Railways present policy is doing is shifting the car parking problem from the city to the suburban shopping centres and residential streets. It is not solving the problem, just moving it somewhere else. If the public try to use the railways this way in the future then more councils will ban all-day car parking for commuters. To disillusion potential rail users in this way, when many of them are just becoming aware of the problems created by the over use of the car, is just plain irresponsible. Depending on the rack used between ten and sixteen bicycles can be stored in the space of one car and thirty times as many in multi-storey installations. The parking of bicycles is an easily manageable problem.

The car-train combination not only has the parking limitation but it ties up the car at the station, which may be a hassle for the one car family and encourages the expensive and wasteful practice of owning more cars than is necessary. The bike-train combination would need safe and secure storage facilities at stations which can easily and cheaply be provided for about one twentieth the cost of parking spaces for cars.

LONG TERM SOLUTION

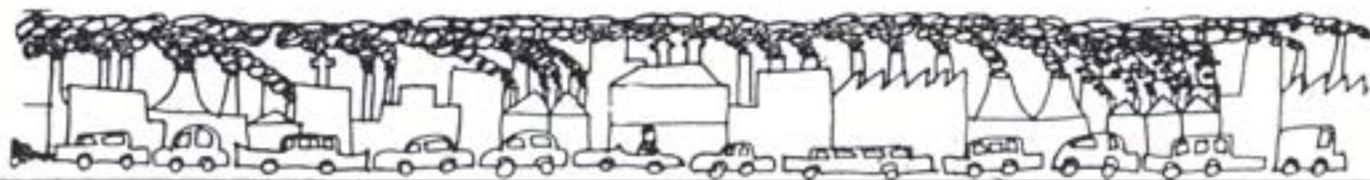
The Dutch manage to use bicycles all year round, by using water-proof clothing and they have much worse weather than we have in Australia. This is no problem for people who see the communal benefit of cycling. What we should be trying to create for future generations is a non-violent passenger transportation system that would reduce the death rate to about one tenth of what it is now and also conserve non-renewable resources for future generations. It seems clear that bicycles and trains operating on their own exclusive rights of way will be one means of achieving this objective. In the large cities where the travel distances are often long, this transport system will be dominated by public transport vehicles and not cars.

If the private use of bicycles can be creatively planned for and integrated with the public transport system, it should be possible to bring about the withering away of our present state of dependence on the private motor car.

RAIL ACCESS

I'm not trying to suggest that using bicycles as feeders to railway stations is the only solution - merely that from a long term point of view it is very promising and preparatory work can be done now. If the bicycle-train combination can be encouraged for the longer trips we make by car, then it will also promote the use of bicycles for many of the short trips we also make by car. Likewise, the increasing use of the bicycle for recreational purposes will encourage people to use the bicycle for straight commuting and in combination with the train. However facilities for the safe and secure storage of bicycles must be provided and safe routes mapped out to the local stations.

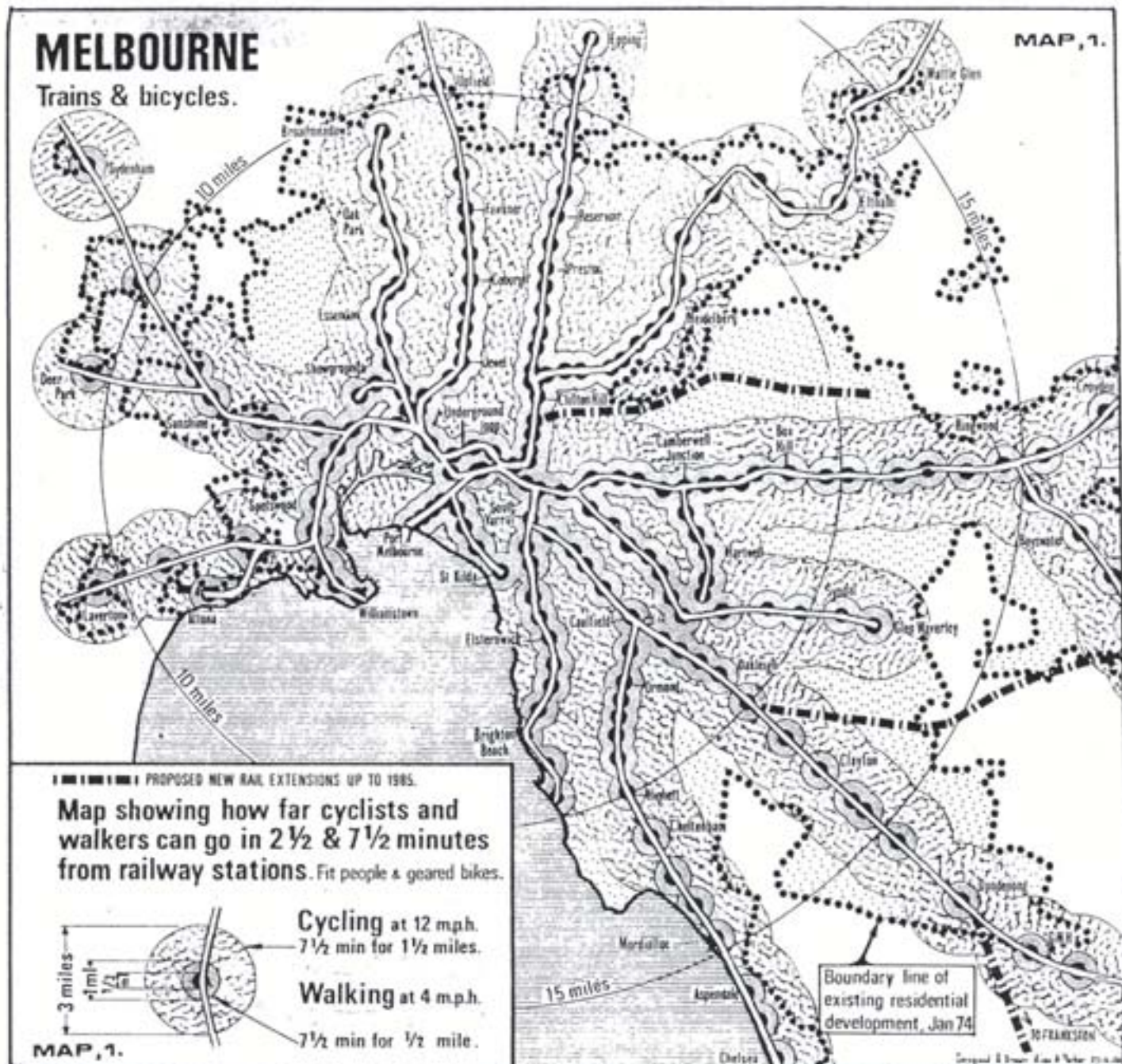
Some people may object to riding a bicycle on arterial roads because of the dangers. This objection can be overcome by finding safe routes through quiet residential streets to the railway station and by walking the bicycle over pedestrian crossings on busy arterial roads. Until such time as the number of adult cyclists are so great that they can form an effective lobby for exclusive bike ways



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Trains & bicycles.

MAP, 1.



medium and long distance commuting will not develop. This is why the most constructive use of bicycles now is in travelling short distances through quiet residential streets to the station and going by rail to the destination, particularly the city.

Apart from the provision of storage facilities there is a case for the provision of bicycles for hire at stations and the use of small fold-up bicycles that could be carried on the trains, so that people with an access problem at both ends of their journey could get quickly to their destination.

What is needed for the future is to stop building freeways or any kind of massive road construction and to start work now on a master plan for an integrated public transport network in which a safe system of bicycle routes through residential streets is planned to connect with railway stations, key bus and tram stops, shopping centres, schools and factories.

Victorian railways and the Ministry of Transport need to do their homework about the implications of the bicycle boom; studies should be made of bicycle hiring, hire-purchase, storage facilities and insurance so that the cyclist could use his own or the railway bicycle in conjunction with the train and connecting bus services. This also applies to express bus services that could be created to run on the existing freeways and highways and integrated with the rail system.

Just as using the Railway more can reduce the need for more, bigger, wider and noisier roads, so the use of integrated bus service makes better use of the roads we have already got. The \$200,000 study of the use of buses in Melbourne commissioned by the Victorian Government does not include any mention of using the bicycle as a feeder in its brief, that is why the money will largely be wasted as it was in the studies done for the Victorian Railways.

Alan Parker

