



SUBIACO BICYCLE USER GROUP

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SUBMISSION TO THE STATE SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY ON SUSTAINABLE LOCAL TRANSPORT FROM THE SUBIACO BICYCLE USERS GROUP

The Subiaco Bicycle User Group advocates for balanced transport, with a focus on cycling and cycling conditions in Subiaco. The Subiaco BUG has an overarching objective to see long term road planning appropriate for sustainable inner city living and transport. A car-centric focus is widely recognised as unsustainable (e.g. *Subiaco Council TravelSmart Action Plan (2000)*), even in the relatively short term, so alternative transport options need to be openly encouraged and provided for. This was also recognised in Subiaco Council's *Strategic Plan Community Wellbeing Report, November 1999*, which stated:

"The increased use of bicycles as a form of transport ... would reduce traffic congestion, minimise air pollution and expand the health and well being of the commuter. It was recommended that all future changes to the road system within the City consider the needs of cyclists"

Further, a recent Dept of Transport study found that **71% of Subiaco residents want traffic planning to favour bicycles rather than the car.** (*DoT (2000) Potential Analysis "Perth"*).

This submission, while focused on Subiaco can be regarded as having fairly generic applicability for sustainable transport and measures to foster increased adoption of sustainable transport modes at the local level in WA.

Background

A Department of Transport survey recently found that cars are involved in over three quarters of the trips made in Subiaco. This is a 5 per cent rise since 1986 and comes at the expense of walking, bicycling and use of public transport - despite Subiaco's ideal location for taking advantage active and public transport. This is a worrying trend and stems largely from the dominance of cars in transport planning, even though less than 50 per cent of the population has a license.

The high and increasing car use comes with major environmental, social and economic costs to the community:

- I **Air pollution** – vehicle emissions are a major source of air pollutants in Perth (e.g. 49% of the nitrogen oxides and 40% of the reactive organic compounds);
- I **Global warming** – about 13% of the State's greenhouse gas emissions come from car use;
- I **Oil dependence** – as availability of cheap oil supplies decline, petrol prices are rising and we will become vulnerable to supply shocks;
- I **Physical inactivity** - reduced active travel is contributing to ill health and growing health care expenses;
- I **Neighbourhood environment** – traffic volume, speed and noise reduce the liveability of our suburb and increase stress, noise and road accidents;
- I **Social disadvantages** – access to work, shops, community facilities and social support can be severely restricted for those without a car; and
- I **Financial costs** – Perth spends 17% of its gross regional product on transport, mostly on running cars and providing roads for them.

Recent surveys in Subiaco have shown that the community is very concerned about increasing car use and its impacts and is keen to see a shift in transport funding priorities toward measures to encourage and provide for active and public transport. For example:

1. Sixty three percent of residents are concerned with the high level of car use in Subiaco (Dept of Transport, 1998: *Subiaco TravelSmart Study*);
2. There is very high concern over: i) the safety of children, particularly going to and around primary schools and at busy road crossings; ii) impacts of heavy traffic on the residential amenity; iii) access to public transport; and iv) lack of provision for bicycles (Dept of Transport, 1999: *Shenton Park Integrated Transport Study*);
3. A safer pedestrian/bicycle environment is needed (City of Subiaco, 1999: *Strategic Plan Community Wellbeing Report*);
4. The effort for pathways/cycleways should be increased (City of Subiaco: Residents' *Satisfaction with the City of Subiaco*); and
5. Traffic is the most undesirable feature of living in Subiaco and lack of cycleways is a major issue for the Subiaco community (City of Subiaco, 1998: *Review of Community Needs Assessment*).

Eighty four percent of people in the metropolitan area want transport policy and planning to favour environmentally friendly modes, and half of the population believe planners have an exaggerated impression of the community's demand for car-oriented planning (Transport, 2000: *TravelSmart 2101, a 10 Year Plan*).

Local issues

- **Child mobility**

There is an alarming reduction in independent mobility of our children. Less and less children walk or cycle to school or recreational activities, while more are driven by car.

This trend has multiple impacts. The level of fitness of children has been declining and their obesity is increasing. Over 20% of boys and girls between 10 and 17 years old are obese, according to the Heart Foundation. Lack of physical activity is a major contributing factor and will have a serious long term impact on Australia's health.

Parents are restricting the independent mobility of their children because of fears of injury by a motor vehicle or fear of being harmed by a bully or stranger. Statistics show that children are more likely to be involved in a car accident than being harmed by a stranger. The volume and speed of traffic has increased considerably over the last 20 years. Tragically, parents driving their children to school and after school activities significantly add to congestion and traffic problems.

Major traffic arteries are being emphasised in the Metropolitan area. However, these arteries frequently seriously restrict safe movement of cyclists, pedestrians and people with disabilities across the roads. The consequence is fracturing communities, something that Labor transport policy explicitly seeks to avoid.

An example of this is Railway Road in Subiaco. Railway Road carries high volumes of fast traffic and separates Subiaco to the east from major destinations for children, such as Daglish Railway Station, Shenton College and western suburbs private schools and sporting facilities to the west. However there are few safe crossing points. The lack of safe crossing points also fractures Perth Bicycle Network routes that cross the road.

The problems with crossing Railway Road are major, local, disincentives to cycling, particularly for school-aged children. Approaches to State and Local Government on these issues have not been received receptively – maintaining traffic flow appears to be accorded higher priority with these bodies than the safety of vulnerable road users, and encouragement of alternative transport modes. Similarly, Thomas Street separates Subiaco residents from Kings Park on the east side, and Aberdare Rd cuts off residents from either side using facilities on the other side.

We request that State and Local Government work together to overcome fracturing of bicycle routes caused by busy traffic corridors.

Our roads need to be made safer for everyone, particularly the more vulnerable users such as cyclists, pedestrians and the disabled, and for children in particular. This needs strong state and local planning and leadership.

This issue pertains to the following areas of Labor Transport Policy:

- a. Actively encouraging the use of bicycles for school journeys
- b. Fostering the TravelSmart program;
- c. Recognising the importance of cycling in local transport plans

- **Footpaths**

Many citizens are especially dependant on safe footpaths, including the disabled (sometimes on motorised chairs), elderly and children (sometimes on bicycles). However, footpaths are frequently too narrow (1.2-1.5 m, while Australian guidelines suggest widths exceeding 2 m where both pedestrians and bicycles use the path), with frequent obstructions such as poles, signage, benches and overhanging vegetation. Changes in the consideration and approach to design and maintenance of footpaths is needed.

The introduction of the uniform Australian Road Rules to Western Australia has created some situations for cyclists on footpaths that are potentially hazardous

The *Road Traffic Code* 2000 s. 216 now makes it legal for children under the age of 12 to ride on footpaths. However, while it remains illegal for accompanying adults to also ride on footpaths the provision does not work effectively. In many situations, where a path is provided on only one side of the road, the accompanying adult would be forced to ride on the opposite side of the road to the child, which is a potentially dangerous practice. It is even dangerous when the adult can cycle on the same side of the road to a footpath.

Since 1999, the New South Wales Traffic Code has provided for accompanying adults to ride on the footpath. There is no reason why WA can not follow the NSW example as it does not contravene the Australian Road Rules, which make allowance for local rules on this matter. We request that the WA Traffic Code be modified to allow for adults accompanying children under 12 to ride on footpaths.

At the same time, the existing requirement for pedestrians to keep left on shared paths was abolished. This retrograde move makes the shared use of these paths by all users less predictable and safe.

The need for a change of approach to footpaths is also highlighted around primary schools where comparatively narrow paths (even less than 1.5 m wide) continue to be built. When coupled with frequent overhanging vegetation, this is inadequate and unsafe for bi-directional flow of bikes (particularly unstable children) and pedestrians.

- **Safety education**

An education/awareness program is needed that focuses on cyclist's safety. For example the issue of opening car doors into the path of cyclists. Further, despite being legitimate road users, when cyclists are injured through a passenger opening a car door, the cyclist has no access to compensation through the Motor Vehicle (Third Party Insurance) Act, since, to succeed, negligence has to be proved against the driver or owner of the motor vehicle. Clearly this needs changing. There is also only a penalty of 1 Penalty Unit (\$50) for the person who opens the vehicle door under Regulation 243 of the *WA Road Traffic Code 2000*.

Another area of motorist education needed relates to Reg 45(3) of the Road Traffic Code: A driver turning to the right or left (except a driver turning left using a slip lane) at an intersection with traffic-control signals shall give way to all pedestrians. Motorists seem generally oblivious of this law, and they not only fail to give way to pedestrians who have right of way at lights, but abuse those that do proceed across.

Western Australia has no significant experience with widespread shared path usage in every street. This lack of experience leaves us now with a need to look carefully at safety issues relating to the new Code. In the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), the suburban footpath is generally not flanked by high fences/walls which can prevent crossing vehicles and bicyclists seeing each other; this situation arose because the ACT has long banned construction of front fences, thus preventing serious collisions occurring at footpath crossovers. In Western Australia, high fences are widespread so an appropriate safety education campaign needs to be run to alert children to the significant dangers posed by cars exiting properties and laneways.

This issue pertains to the following areas of Labor Transport Policy:

- a. Actively encourage the use of bicycles for school;
- b. Fostering the TravelSmart and Safer Routes to School programs.

- **Suburban road speed limit**

We are very pleased that Minister Roberts has reduced speeds on local roads to 50 kph. Fifty kph is a good start but should not be regarded as the end. According to Queensland Transport, one child in two is killed when struck at 50 kph; this is scary considering that it takes 42m for a car travelling at 50 kph to stop, which is several suburban house blocks. Many American and European cities already have 40 kph and even 30 kph residential street limits. In Australia, the City of Unley in South Australia has had a 40 kph limit since 1999 following surveys that showed 70% support from residents.

Apart from the lives that lower traffic speeds will save, much of the need for expensive and bicycle-dangerous 'traffic calming' devices on local roads could be questioned. We support the Government's lowering of traffic speeds to 50 kph and request that further reductions be investigated, particularly in

older suburbs such as Vincent, West Perth, Subiaco, Fremantle and Victoria Park, and suburbs with narrow streets.

Achieving reductions in traffic speeds will be dependent on effective enforcement. Residential street traffic speed enforcement has not been allocated high priority in the past, so perhaps strategies and priorities should be reconsidered with the introduction of the 50 kph limit.

Applicable Labor Transport Policy is:

- a. Making cycling safe on local roads
- b. Expanding the TravelSmart Program to encourage greater use of public transport, cycling and walking.

- **Car parking and road conditions**

Most roads do not comply with the principles of the spatial requirements for bicycles, as developed in the Austroads Guide to Traffic Engineering Practice Part 14 for Bicycles. There is excessive provision for motor traffic. In order to provide a safe, healthy and friendly environment for walking and cycling in urban areas, it is essential to reduce the dominant spatial provision for high speed motorised traffic to promote useful cycling, walking and public transport conditions. There is a major need to provide adequate operational space for cyclists on all roads and streets to provide an equitable alternative to car travel. Where adequate road space cannot be provided either solely or shared, speed limits and road design should provide adequate operational space to promote cycling, walking and public transport to the benefit of local amenity and environment

Free and abundant parking is a major disincentive for uptake of environmentally friendly transport and therefore fosters growing road congestion. Further, kerbside parking on narrow streets that do not cater for cyclists endangers bike riders. Opening car doors are the bane of cyclists' existence and the clearance needed to avoid the possibility of collision takes cyclists well out into the road, subjecting them to car dangers. Suburbs that rely heavily on kerbside parking are squeezing bikes off the road but failing to provide off-road facilities. It is well accepted that segregation of bikes and cars is one of the most important ways to increase cycling. A cultural shift is needed away from expecting widely available free parking - local planning should encourage off-street parking, and favour the freed-up space being used for safe transit of bicycles and pedestrians.

- **End of trip facilities**

Lack of end of trip facilities is a major disincentive to cycling. Showers and changing facilities and secure bicycle storage are foremost considerations. Access to showering and changing facilities, as well as secure bicycle storage areas in medium to large scale developments should be mandated through local planning laws. Further, there should be wider access for the general community to such facilities.

- **Integrated transport**

Integration between transport modes needs more attention. For example, combining train travel and bicycle to get to/from work is currently strongly discouraged by peak hour restrictions on trains – rolling stock is needed that provides for bicycles (and prams, wheel chairs, gophers etc).

- **WA Public Sector Restructuring**

Following the adoption of the Machinery of Government Report agencies in the transport portfolio have been developing the detail of the new structure and roles. We are concerned at the lack of external consultation that this process has involved to date. The approach apparently being taken seems to be to carry out the restructure and then to 'sell' it to stakeholders.

We have concerns in a number of areas:

- The role and priority of transport in the new Planning and Infrastructure organisation
- State and local government roles and responsibilities
- The abolition of Bikewest
- Adequately providing for and enhancing the full range of bicycle related functions of the previous structure
- Ensuring that transport infrastructure across the State is safe for all users and built to accepted standards

- **Traffic 'calming'**

The safety of bike riders and other vulnerable road users is often overlooked when local authorities install 'traffic calming' devices. These devices are proliferating on metropolitan streets, including streets that are part of Perth Bicycle Network routes. Their general emphasis on creating 'squeeze-points' is creating very hazardous streets for cyclists and turning much of the community, particularly school-aged children, away from cycling. For example, at squeeze points, vehicles are forced to come dangerously close to bicycles, that in turn can be forced into road-side hazards such as drainage grates, exacerbating the dangers.

Often road authorities appear ill informed about the needs of bicycle road safety and tend not to be receptive to providing for bicycle safety after being made aware of the hazards. Process and structural changes in Government are needed:

1. There should be an independent bicycle safety audit on the traffic calming devices used in WA
2. Subsequently the State Government should issue clear recommendations to local governments concerning acceptable designs and acceptable modifications to existing structures to improve safety for bike riders
3. The Department for Planning and Infrastructure should arrange an independent audit of MRWA's existing traffic calming standards and their method of delivery.

This issue has major ramifications to implementation of Labor Party policy:

- a. Working with local government to incorporate on-road bicycle networks;
- b. Encouraging use of bicycles for school journeys by making cycling safer on local roads;
- d. Incorporating bicycle infrastructure and recognising the importance of cycling in local transport plans;
- e. Fostering the TravelSmart program;

- **Perth Bicycle Network**

Labor promises in the February 2001 election included \$20 M for cycle path development in Perth and regional centres. This is less than half of what is required and also less than the \$26 M allocated by the Court Government in 1996. Strong financial support of the Perth Bicycle Network (PBN) is required to integrate cycling into the overall transport network. The promising start made by the Court Government may stall, leaving a seriously fragmented and sparse provision for cyclists.

Implementation of PBN Stage 2 is urgently needed. A survey has shown that 75% of our community support increased spending on cycling facilities, while only 45% favoured additional spending on roads and freeways. We request the Government to not resile from its commitment of \$20 M over 4 years and strongly push for this to be increased to at least \$10 M a year – an insignificant amount alongside a capital works budget for roads that runs into the billions of dollars.

Since 1993 we have been awaiting completion of the principal shared path networks along the railway lines to Fremantle, Midland and Armadale. Some minor disjointed sections of these paths have been built, but the paths are seriously fragmented and only 30-40% complete on the Fremantle line, and very much less to Midland and Armadale. It would be unthinkable to leave large gaps in a road network. We request that the Government commit to completing the principal shared paths along the railway lines in the very near future.

It is also important that State Government continue to oversee implementation of the Perth Bike Network, as relinquishing this role to local government is likely to lead to a poorly connected system and inconsistent approaches.

Labor Transport Policy committed the Government to:

- a. Allocating \$20 M over four years to the expansion of dedicated bike paths in Perth and regional centres.
- b. Working with local government to incorporate bike paths and on-road bicycle networks.
- c. Incorporating bicycle infrastructure and recognising the importance of cycling in local and regional transport plans.
- d. Providing secure and accessible bicycle storage and parking facilities at major bus and train stations.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Miles Dracup

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