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Introduction

? A national network of bicycle routes is a key element of a sustainable transport system for tourism, utility travel and recreation.

? bicycle tourism can generate considerable wealth for regional economies and the nature of the income generated is such that it has high local multiplier effects in both money and employment.

? the benefits of a more healthy and active population - through the encouragement of bicycle travel - has major long-term benefits throughout our society and its economy.

? independent travel by bicycle in childhood and adolescence is an important aspect of raising self-reliant adults.

? bicycle travel is strongly complementary to other sustainable modes of transport, such as railways.

* Tourism is already a major contributor to our economy and is growing rapidly. In many of its present forms, however, it is a heavy user of petroleum-based transport and we need to work hard on building attractive alternatives. One important alternative is bicycle tourism.

* Bicycle tourism has particularly high economic and employment multiplier effects in local communities. A major side benefit of encouraging bicycle tourism is that the networks we build can also serve some of the transport needs of local people, and can serve to encourage them to keep their own business in town.

* The value of bicycle touring - Bicycling infrastructure can help bring large numbers of bicycle tourists to an area for a relatively small investment. The spending power of cycle tourists is, however, comparable to that of other tourists. As research by Tourism Victoria has shown (Hopkins

1999), backpacker tourists (of which cycletourists are a subset) spend less per day - about \$59 - than the average overseas tourist, but stay much longer and thus tend to spend about double the average per capita.

According to data from Bicycle Victoria's Great Rides and the Bicycle Institute of NSW's Big Ride, local cycletourists spend about this amount per day, too. The spending of cycletourists tends to be of kinds that have high multiplier effects - estimated at around 2.6 by the Bureau of Resource Economics - in local economy and employment.

* Trails and networks - An important aspect of bicycle touring infrastructure is the creation of named trails such as the Mawson Trail in South Australia, the Trans-Tasmania Trail and the Murray River Trail. But even more important is the linking of trails into a coherent network. Trails and networks may link existing infrastructure and purpose-built paths. The important factor is consistency over the whole system in the signage and the accessibility.

* Local usage of networks - If a cycletouring path network serves local people's needs as well as those of visitors, the trail system will be better maintained, because local riders are much more likely to report problems to the authorities. The network will also have a greater social mass, making it a more welcoming environment for travellers.

* Local Employment - The making of bicycle trails, their signage, mapping and the building of associated facilities is work that has quite a high labour-to-capital ratio. It comprises a variety of skill levels and is thus very well suited to the skill levels of many long-term unemployed rural people. Once the trails are in place, the extra income from bicycle tourism should sustain employment levels

* Infrastructure for walking and cycling - Bicycling is widely regarded as urban, rather than rural, transport because it is primarily useful for short trips. In fact, though, bicycling has a great deal to contribute to transport in rural areas, and has potential to generate considerable economic activity and employment. The habitual travelling of large distances by car is tearing rural communities apart, especially through shopping trips to regional centres. Good infrastructure for walking and cycling can help refocus country towns by making local trips significantly more convenient and pleasurable than trips to larger regional centres. A key element of cost-effective planning of bicycle infrastructure for bicycle tourism is to provide a network for all people to ride on. If the network is not attractive to locals for their own transport needs, we need to improve the network. Local usage helps give the network a social vitality and it makes maintenance easier because there are so many people regularly inspecting - and reporting on - its condition as they ride about on their business.

* Cycling can actually be an even better transport option in the country than in the city because the roads may be quieter and the trips much more pleasant. Even if trips distances were greater in country areas than in the city, the relative

lack of obstructions and interruptions generally means that such trips might take no more time or effort than a much shorter urban trip.

* Present impediments to bicycle usage: Cycletouring is a marginal activity in present-day Australia because of several major disincentives, both infrastructural and institutional. Some significant infrastructural impediments are:

****The major roads throughout Australia are intimidating for most cyclists. Until we can have ordinary men, women and children able to ride in the countryside, cycletouring will remain a sectional activity.

**** Minor roads tend to be poorly mapped, insufficiently signed and not always well networked for touring. It takes considerable expertise to plan a good bicycle tour in absence of specific infrastructure. **** With the closure of so many bridges on minor roads, cyclists can be faced with a long and time-consuming detour, often with no advance warning. It is vital that disused road (and rail) bridges be maintained as thoroughfares for cyclists and walkers.

****There are fewer trains on fewer lines running fewer services to fewer stations, and they often cannot take bicycles, or are limited to two single bikes (no tandems or tricycles).

**** Road coaches are even more restrictive, with bicycles only carried at the driver's discretion.

****Interstate carriage of bicycles by rail is exorbitant. It costs \$50 per bike, per state, whereas other luggage travels free. By contrast, bicycles cost just \$20 per trip by air within Australia.

****Water stops and other facilities are more widely spaced than they used to be. Many parts of Outback Australia had higher populations last century than now, and people could walk, ride or cycle from place to place. Water supplies used to be available, even in the driest country, at intervals of 15 km or so, but most of these have dried up through neglect.

CONCLUSIONS

* Bicycle touring is a highly sustainable form of tourism. Bicycle tourists are good spenders and encouraging them is very cost-effective.

* Bicycles are also very efficient transport for everyday short trips and networks of bicycle paths can contribute a lot to improving community fitness, and the wellbeing of the community itself.

* Providing for bicycle travel should not attempt to distinguish too strongly between tourist travel and utility travel, but should comprise networks that serve all types of riding, just as roads provide for all kinds of travel.

* Rail systems and cycling networks complement each other and should be planned with this in mind.

* Easy travel by car has robbed country areas of much of their economic and civic life. Encouraging local travel by bicycle can help bring back some of this vitality.

* Working conditions, especially in the cities, need to be improved to allow people more time in the countryside; more time to spend their money on goods and services with high economic multiplier effects, rather than imported luxuries.

Sincerely,

John Cogill