



CYCLISTS' ACTION GROUP

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Submission to Senate inquiry into Australia's future oil supply

"Every time I see an adult on a bicycle I no longer despair for the human race."

H.G. Wells

Peak Oil has so far been overlooked by decision-makers because it is too hard to envisage. Bicycle transport has been overlooked so far because it is too simple.

It is time that both Peak Oil and the transport potential of bicycles were both given far more consideration.

It is quite practical to aim for 20% of all urban and country town trips to be taken by bicycle, up from the current level of about 5%.

1: The Cyclists' Action Group feels it imperative that action is taken now to reduce the oil vulnerability of Australia's transport system by taking seriously the existing and potential role of non-motorised and low-power transport modes. President Bush has acknowledged that the US is addicted to oil, and Australia is also very oil-dependent. Our nation may well be hit very seriously by Peak Oil within a decade or sooner, and it is essential to start implementing mitigation and adaptation measures well before the Peak arrives. This is because of the long lead-times to complete infrastructure programmes.

2: Australia's oil and refined product imports are already about \$15 billion pa and will grow many-fold as our level of self-sufficiency drops sharply in the years ahead and as world crude oil prices rise after Peak Oil. In about a decade, Australia will be using over 1 million barrels of oil per day on current trends and producing only about a third of that (Geoscience/ABARE). Importing the remainder will cost almost Au\$50 billion pa, at current exchange rates if the international oil price only doubles in the next decade, and of course much more if oil prices continue rising sharply

3: Providing adequate safe and efficient bicycle and pedestrian facilities for cities, rural centres and country towns is a crucial, cost-effective and significant simple first step towards reducing our oil vulnerability. It is vital that substantial Federal funding be provided for bicycle and pedestrian transport, and for related low-powered vehicles such as the electric scooters and power-assisted bicycles which are being used in increasing numbers with on-going technological and demographic changes.

3: A Federal Government scheme like the past US ISTEA programme will be essential, with initial funding of \$200 million pa for bicycle and pedestrian transport required, growing to \$1,000 million pa to overcome decades of neglect of these transport modes. This will still be only a small fraction of our annual oil import bill, and will be more than balanced by the potential on-going fuel savings. This

level of funding would be adequate to complete the provision of high standard close-spaced bicycle transport networks (of separate paths and on-road bicycle lanes) in our cities and major regional centres and to provide good facilities in country towns.

4: Providing facilities for bicycle and pedestrian transport are "No-Regrets" options, in that they are already justified on health, environmental, social and equity grounds. There is also a clear community understanding and preference for far more to be done for bicycle transport. Around 46% of Australian people do not have a driver's licence, while the transport system is very heavily dominated by the provision for car-drivers at the expense of the convenience and safety of other road users like cyclists and pedestrians.

5: Already, some 5% of Australian urban and country town trips are undertaken by bicycle. About half the urban trips are of distances less than 5km which can be covered in 15-20 minutes by bicycle (ordinary adult urban cyclists can average 15-20 km/hr in many areas). Short urban trips use more fuel and produce more pollution per km as the motor vehicles and pollution control equipment are running cold for much of the short trips. It is quite practical to aim for a level of 20% Australian urban and country-town trips to be taken by bicycle. Already many European cities have higher levels of usage than this.

6: The Federal Health Minister has recently launched a media campaign aimed at the alarming and very costly rise in childhood and adult obesity. The physical activity from bicycle transport and walking trips has substantial proven benefits for both physical and mental health. The improvement of community health levels from increased active transport alone would justify the funding for bicycle transport. The sharp declines in the number of students riding bicycles to Australian schools could easily be reversed if funding is available for facilities, bicycle education programmes and encouragement campaigns.

7: Oil shortages, fuel rationing and the like, although not certain, are quite possible in many Peak Oil scenarios. The social impacts on the outer suburbs of our cities, and on the unemployed and the economically and socially disadvantaged could well be very serious indeed. The cheap and healthy option of bicycle transport will be much more cost-effective indeed than providing public transport for all possible trips in the outer suburbs, which are already being hard hit by the current very small rises in fuel costs (Dodson J and Sipe N., 2005, *"Oil Vulnerability in Australian Cities"*, Griffith University).

8: Already many Australians, including a sizable proportion in their 60s and 70s, ride bicycles long distances (up to 100km/day) for recreation and for touring holidays. For instance, a single bicycle club, the Perth-based Over-55 Cycling Club records that its 200 or so members (all over 55 years of age) rode almost 250,000 kms on club rides alone during 2005. These trends towards greater interest and participation in bicycle transport are likely to continue, and will be greatly accelerated if road authorities actually provided comprehensive complete bicycle networks in urban areas, and in near-city rural areas. The encouragement of local low-fuel bicycle vacations will be very important after Peak Oil for the economic health of rural communities, and social and financial health of city-dwellers who are no longer able to afford traditional air-travel and long-distance car travel.

9: The Cyclists' Action Group fully supports all the points made in the submission from the WA Cycling Committee of the WA Department of Planning and Infrastructure; in particular, the need for action to be implemented well in advance of "Peak Oil". The Hirsch report to US DoE and WA's Minister for Planning and Infrastructure have made the simple statements that considerable time is needed to implement Peak Oil countermeasures and the costs of not starting soon enough will probably be enormous.