Using Special Projects to Increase Cycling: The Sydney 2000 Olympics as a Case Study

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1.0 Introduction

The following paper discusses the subject of cycling infrastructure (capital works and cycleway maps) presently being provided as part of the Sydney 2000 Olympics cultural and transportation "package" and whether this is a mechanism to increase the use of bicycles after the Olympics.

A background is given of the cycling situation in Barcelona during the period leading up to the 1992 Olympic Games. Also mentioned are the bicycle facilities that were provided as part of the Olympic games city renovation package and a consequence of the bicycle lobby group's actions prior and around the time of the Olympics. An early facility provided being "the diagonal avenue bicycle lane" was a historical event giving momentum to the cyclists and a starting point for future bicycle planning in Barcelona.

The paper summarises the bicycle infrastructure (both capital works and cycling related programs) that has been provided as part of the Sydney Olympic games and the strategic instruments in place to ensure that the implementation of cycleways will continue after the Olympics.

The planning priorities of Sydney's Olympic's authorities are discussed and questions are raised about the transport values held by the authorities and their influence over the travel choices of Sydney residents.

A concluding section discusses the Athens Olympic games planned for 2004 with some suggested planning strategies.

The paper is therefore divided into the following sections:

- 1992 Olympic Games - A starting point for cycling facilities in Barcelona?;
- Sydney Olympics Cycling Infrastructure - A summary;
- Future Planning Momentum and
- Suggestions for Future Events

2.0 1992 Olympic Games - A Starting Point for Cycling Facilities in Barcelona?

In April 1977 the grand demonstration for the bicycle took place in Barcelona to try to make the streets bicycle safe. In 1979, some industrial engineering students of Barcelona worked together to reinvent the bicycle as a mode of transport. The bicycle lobby became more active and in 1992 with the advent of the Olympic games and the city's upgrade (both cosmetic and functional) there was an opportunity to lobby the government to include a system of pedestrian and cycleways in the city's architectural and building program.

Ibanez states (1) that in 1992 with the celebration of the Olympic games there was supposed to be a change in the conception of the city of Barcelona. The creation of circular entries into the city were to liberate the city from traffic and theoretically allow more space for pedestrians and cyclists.

Changes were to be made in the foreshore area to bring Barcelona closer to the sea with the construction of new buildings and streets but this occurred with little presence of cycling infrastructure.

As stated above by Ibanez, the few cycling facilities provided were a token gesture and were not on the scale experienced in the city's architecture and design program.

The first real steps in providing road infrastructure for bicycles occurred the year of the Barcelona Olympics with the opening of the Diagonal Avenue Bicycle Lane and "carriles-bici" for the Olympic zone.(2) The event of the Olympic games saw pressure from the "Amics i amigues de la Bici", leading to the realisation of objectives to create 50kms of bicycle lanes in Barcelona together with further promotion of the bicycle with the Municipal Bicycle Program 1993-1995.

In 1994, the Plan *Carril-Bici para Barcelona* proposed 100kms of cycleways to be completed by 1997.(3) The routes were planned to provide cycleways in both horizontal and vertical directions. Providing cycleways along the Barcelona waterfront from the main port, linking the Olympic zones to nearby beach areas. A visit made along the foreshore pathway system in 1997 by the author identified the pathways mainly used as a tourist/recreational facility.

The event of the Barcelona Olympic Games was a mechanism used to lobby the government to start building a network of cycleways. The Olympics provided the momentum necessary to drive the lobby group to insist that facilities needed to be provided in-line with the other upgrades in transport and beautification occurring in the city.

3.0 Sydney Olympics Cycling Infrastructure - A Summary

It is feasible for Sydney to have high bicycle use due to favourable physical and cultural conditions: a near perfect climate all year round, a public transport system accommodating dual mode travel and a tradition of children cycling.

Apart from some steep topography, the lack of safe cycling facilities (integrating bicycles in the overall transport and land use system) is a main reason people do not cycle. The community's perception is that cycling is unsafe and not such a viable transport option. Additionally, the "love affair" with cars has left the bicycle as an unpopular choice, merely for racing cyclists and "old hippies".

As a consequence of planning for the Sydney Olympics, changes have taken place with the implementation of cycling infrastructure in the form of capital works (green links, cycleways and shared bicycle/pedestrian facilities)and information for cyclists in the form of publicity and cycling maps.

The Sydney Olympics main site at Homebush Bay is located approximately 19 km from the Sydney Central Business District. The cycleways and green links provide the framework for linking suburban Sydney with the Olympic village at Homebush Bay and promoting the Sydney Olympics as the "Green Olympics". This has been due to the efforts of at least 28 local councils, the bicycle lobby group, Bicycle New South Wales and State Government bodies including The Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, The Roads and Traffic Authority and The State Rail Authority. Strategic planning documents including: *Action for Bikes Bike Plan 2010,* Roads and Traffic Authority, September, 1999 and the *Parramatta River Foreshores Improvement Program,*

Department of Urban Affairs and Planning,1999 will be used to allow for cycleway implementation to continue after the Olympics.

The main projects undertaken as cycleway infrastructure for the Sydney Olympics that can be used before, during and after the Olympic games as major transport and recreational links for the Sydney area include the update and distribution of the Sydney Cycleway Maps focussing on the Homebush Bay area and surrounding 28 Sydney local government areas and four cycle capital works:

- Cycleways Map Update
- Homebush Bay Site
- Parramatta River Foreshores
- Duck River Cycleway
- Meadowbank Bridge

Cycleways Map Update

The cycleways map is centred on Homebush Bay, and covers the cycleways located in the 28 local council areas around the site. The map has been developed and updated for the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. This map will be updated after the Olympics to illustrate new cycle facilities with adjoining maps for the Sydney, Newcastle, Central coast and Illawarra region maps all updated periodically.(4)

Homebush Bay Main Olympics Site

The on-road and off-road cycleways throughout the Homebush Bay Olympics site form a network of cycleways within the site and link to adjacent Bicentennial Park, the new Meadowbank bridge (explained below) and adjacent suburbs.(5) The facilities are used as a circuit by racing cyclists for training and race meets.

Parramatta River Foreshores

The Sydney Olympics have provided a new impetus for the rejuvenation of the Parramatta River foreshores and the river foreshores presented an excellent opportunity for cycling which is an important aspect of the Olympic Games' green image. The green links, walking and cycle shared pathways join the Olympic site with the Parramatta River at Homebush Bay and are also important to Homebush Bay and the adjacent Millennial Parklands which are located to the natural hub of Sydney's future bicycle network. (6 and 12)

The NSW Department of Urban Affairs and Planning has been managing the Parramatta River Foreshores Improvement Program (PRFIP) which has planned and begun creating pedestrian and cycleways on the Parramatta and lower Duck Rivers foreshores. The Program concentrated on three routes which improve the access to the Olympic site but also open new access along or across the Parramatta River for future use after the Olympics.(6)

Duck River Accessway

The new section of the Duck River Accessway for pedestrian and bicycle access has been proposed as an important "linkage to Homebush Bay / Parramatta River to Auburn." (15)

The route is designed to link to the foreshore route as part of the Millennial Parklands development over 10 years. The Duck River pathway has potential to connect to the Bankstown Velodrome (an Olympic facility) in the south and to the proposed "Bay to Mountains" arterial RTA route planned for completion by 2006 (10).

The Parramatta River Foreshores Improvement Program and Greenspace (both Department of Urban Affairs and Planning programs) have paid for the route assessment and design and Greenspace funds have been allocated for two small sections of the proposed route. Similarly, the construction of the entire route is beyond DUAP and Council means. However, this route will assume greater significance when the Millennial Parklands foreshore route is constructed and has some chance of being implemented due to Council's commitment and because it is identified in the RTA strategic document BikePlan 2010 for implementation in 2007(16).

Unused Railway Bridge Converted for Cycle/Pedestrian Use

The shared pedestrian cycleway on the old Meadowbank-Rhodes railway bridge opened in April 2000. The old railway bridge is a significant heritage item. The new use is a good way of ensuring conservation of this railway structure dating from the nineteenth century.(17)

The 3.5 m wide shared cycle/pedestrian path is constructed of fibre reinforced plastic grid flooring material and is strong light-weight, durable and resistant to corrosion and chemicals. A plastic-coated chain wire security fence surrounds the path.(7)

The shared path is the first component of the improved river gateway to Homebush Bay, which is planned under the Parramatta River Foreshores Improvement Program. When other components are improved, it will be possible to walk or cycle a complete loop comprising the river foreshores between Ryde Bridge and railway bridges or landscaped streets.(6)

The pathway is connected to the local street networks on both sides of the Parramatta River. As well as providing a new river crossing and a convenient and safe connection to Homebush Bay, the new link enhances the role of Meadowbank located on the northern side of the river, where rail, road, ferry and cycle ways intersect, as a transport interchange. From Meadowbank, cyclists can travel further out to the east or west along the existing Parramatta Valley Cycleway, to the south, towards Homebush Bay. In the future, links are planned from the bridge to the Millennial Parklands residential area and links to Botany Bay.(6)

The project was initiated with Department of Urban Affairs and Planning leadership . Total funding of $1.2m was made up of contributions from the department and the Roads and Traffic Authority and the State Rail. The RTA has become the major contributor while the local council (Ryde Council) contributed the project management.(6)

(Refer to Figure 1)

Figure 1, photo Warren Salomon

The facilities planned for the Olympic games together with the various planning instruments in place, including local council bicycle plans and (State Government documents) the Action for Bikes Bike Plan 2010, and the Parramatta River Foreshores Improvement Program are mechanisms that will continue to re-shape the cycling environment over the next ten years.

4.0 Future Planning Momentum

The construction of the above facilities has been a positive step for the future of cycleways in Sydney. More could have been achieved for bicycles during the capital works construction of the Olympics facilities. This would have been possible through the identification of the bicycle by the Olympics organisers in the same light as public transport.

The planning for the main Sydney Olympics site at Homebush Bay was primarily the concern of two organisations, the OCA (Olympic Co-ordination Authority) and transportation being the responsibility of the ORTA (Olympic Roads and Transport Authority). Both these organisations were consulted by local Councils, State Government bodies and the bicycle lobby group prior to any plans or work be undertaken for cycle facilities within the Olympic Sites.

A further increase in cycling could have occurred had there been a different set of values by the organisations involved in planning for the Olympics venue and transport. The ORTA invested resources to provide public transport infrastructure and thereby promoted and encouraged public transport use to the Sydney public. The Sydney public started using public transport to view events such as major football games (before the Olympics). This behaviour is expected to continue during and after the Olympic games. Public transport services were made more efficient with the rail link to Homebush Bay and car parking spaces were limited at Homebush Bay to discourage private car journeys to the site.

The planning for the Olympics has created a legacy in Sydney for public transport use where in the past people would take their cars to events. The Sydney public switched over to public transport to reach Homebush Bay due to the lack of parking spaces and increased efficiency and promotion of public transport.

It is evident through surveys undertaken at Lidcombe railway station (closest station with parking near the Olympics) that people presently park there to take the train to the Homebush Bay site (the preliminary results of interviews undertaken of 750 people travelling to nearby Lidcombe station revealed that over 50% of respondents use public transport to reach Homebush Bay).(14)

Perhaps an opportunity has been lost for the cyclists of Sydney to have more cycleways as part of the Olympics package. It is unfortunate that the ORTA and the OCA did not place the same emphasis into non-motorised transport, nor positively promote the use of bicycles to reach the Olympic site or create cycleways alongside the creation of public transport infrastructure.

The provision of new cycleways, specifically for transport, could have reinvented the bicycle as a legitimate transport mode, as seems the case with successfully reinventing public transport. Positively persuading the Sydney public to use the bicycle as they have been encouraged to use trains and buses would have been one step in providing a Greener Olympics. A new group of cyclists could have been born to continue well after the Olympics.

The Sydney Olympics would have been a good avenue to promote the use of bicycles along the mainly flat route from the CBD to the Olympics site and use of dual mode travel. Had the OCA and ORTA made the same resource investment with cycle facilities as they have with public transport the results could have meant more emphasis on the use of bicycles by the Sydney public and the acceptance of bicycles commensurate with the recent acceptance of public transport.

5.0 Suggestions for Future Events

From the above discussion it can be seen that some infrastructure has been provided for cyclists in Sydney to co-incide with the Olympic Games and will continue to be used after the Olympic Games. The capital works and infrastructure provided for the Olympics has assisted with creating a basic network of cycleways that can be extended upon in future years as part of the various Government bodies strategic planning programs.

More planning and provision of bicycle facilities could have occurred by adopting the same philosophy for bicycles that was strategically used to develop a more efficient public transport network.

It is important that the Olympics planning officials in Athens understand the benefits of using bicycles alongside the planned upgrade in Athens' public transport system. Where new corridors are created for rail, light rail and bus transport these should include pedestrian and cycleway connections alongside. The corridors that are planned for public transport capital works (created above ground) should form the corridor for cycleways and walkways.

There is presently one cycle route identified as part of the Olympic infrastructure in Athens, linking around the Athens foreshore. (9) The Athens based lobby group, "Fili Tou Podylatou" or "Friends of the Bicycle" could further lobby to include the bicycle into the Olympic public transport option for Athens rather than only including bicycles for mere recreation and tourism use.

An opportunity exists for Athens to provide cycleways as part of the proposed transport package that will re-shape Athens during and after the Olympic games relieving the present traffic congestion and pollution problem faced by the city.

Notes:

1. Oscar Ibanez Sierra, “Barcelona duerme, en el asiento trasero de un coche” in *Velo City 97 Conference Proceedings*, 1997, page 80.

2. Llaurado Villalante Manel, “Mobility in Barcelona: the role of the Bicycle”in *Velo Australis International Bicycle Conference*, 1996, page 353.

3. Ferrer Amador, “La planificacion urbanistica del carril-bici en Barcelona”in *Libro De Ponencias. 10 Congreso Internacional de Planificacion para la Bicicleta*, September 1997, page 240.

4. Personal Communication, Stephen Soelistio, Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (February 2000.)

5. Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW, *Sydney Cycleways Map - Homebush Bay*, April 2000.

6. Personal Communication, Eva Cermak, Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, May 2000.

7. Personal Communication, Caroline Kades and Warren Salomon, May 2000.

8. Personal Communication, Brian Smith, Senior transport planner, May 2000.

9. Personal Communication, Yiannis Paraskevopoulos, May 2000.

10. Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW *Action for Bikes Bike Plan 2010,* Roads and Traffic Authority, September 1999, page 5.

11. Ibid., page 5.

12. Personal Communication, Richard Searle, Traffic Engineer Auburn Council,April - May 2000.

13. Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW, Op. Cit., page 5.

14. Cycle Planning, *Lidcombe Traffic Surveys* - Interim Report Prepared for Auburn Council, April 2000.

15. Arup Transportation Planning, *Duck River Accessway*, 1998, page 1.

16. Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW, Op. Cit., page 5.

17. AA.VV., *New Cycle Crossing Over Paramatta River at Meadowbank- Rhodes*, typed document (To be published in *Australian Cyclist*, June 2000).

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