REVOLVING DOORS:

ALIGNING THE USER, THE PLANNER, THE BUREAUCRAT AND THE POLITICIAN

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Ian Ker is an economist by training but has worked for over thirty years with engineers and planners in all areas of transport research, policy and planning, specialising in those areas of transport that the mainstream does not handle well, including bicycles and access for people with disabilities. His experience with bicycle policy and planning dates from the Perth Bikeplan of 1985 and has continued recently with convening the 1996 Velo Australis Conference in Fremantle, Western Australia, and the 'Bike Ahead' Strategy and the Perth Bicycle Network Plan.

As a local government Councillor, he has promoted the development and implementation of the Vincent Bikeplan, in conjunction with the Perth Bicycle Network in the Town, and a local area traffic management strategy. that includes low speed zones for the whole Town.

He was elected to the inaugural Council of the Town of Vincent in May 1995. He currently chairs the Disability Access Advisory Group and the Local Area Traffic Management Advisory Group. In both of these roles, he is very aware of the both the constraints and opportunities provided by a well-established area and the financial pressures that come from a relatively small non-residential rate base.

SYNOPSIS

The author has been a cyclist for 45 years, a planner/policy-maker for over 30 years, a cycle planner/policy-maker for 15 years, rarely a bureaucrat (but has worked with many) and now a local politician for 5 years. Successful development and implementation of cycle programs depends upon achieving a balance between these four key roles - user, planner, bureaucrat and politician - failure in respect of any one can jeopardize the success of even the 'best' initiatives.

The paper will build on insights, success and failures (of the author and others) to identify ways of:

- creating user acceptance of the real physical and political context within which cycle programs must evolve to be successful;
- persuading the planners and policy-makers that it was really all their idea in the first place (and hence it must be an extremely good one);
- removing the bureaucrats from potentially obstructing positions of influence; and
- presenting politicians with opportunities too good to refuse.

The examples are largely drawn from Australian experience, but the lessons are universal. Some examples are drawn from other areas of transport that live outside the mainstream, but the lessons are relevant.

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 1983, I was in Melbourne, Victoria, working on a Government submission to the National Freight Inquiry and a statewide grain cartage contract for the Victorian Railways. The last thing I expected was to be asked to head a team to develop a Bikeplan for Perth in Western Australia, but I was.

My only qualifications were that I had an interest in green issues, had a bicycle since I was seven years old and learned to ride in the inner suburbs of London, which even in the 1950s were not good for cycling, and hence learned a lot of lessons the hard way.

I was, however, less than 50 metres from Alastair Hepburn, who, in 1977, gave the world the 4-Es comprehensive bikeplan. I could, at least, appear casual in asking the naive questions. It helped that Alastair Hepburn was a founding father of land use/transport planning in Perth, with the Stephenson-Hepburn Plan of 1955, later (1963) formalised in the Metropolitan Region Planning Scheme. This provided the long-term basis for development in Perth.

2. DEALING WITH THE MEDIA

My first lesson came before I started work! Arriving at Perth Airport, on the late-night flight from Melbourne, I found myself face to face with a television camera crew and interviewer: 'Would I mind giving them an interview?' It is dark outside (so they brought a camera with light that makes you squint), you are jet-lagged from the plane journey, it is after 1.00am by your biological clock and you don't know much about bicycle planning – what do you do? You give the interview, of course, and learn that you don't need to know much for a 30-second video/sound bite for the TV news – and the sage nodding that interviewers do on-screen is recorded after the interview, not in response to your words of wisdom – after all, there was only one camera.

Lesson number two was with the print media, a few days later. An hour's interview (newspaper journalists have more time) produces 24 column-inches in the *West Australian* newspaper – you realise you know more than you thought you did – or at least you can give a passable impression of doing so! Much of what we do is to convince others of what we already knew. There is even a hint of Mayer Hillman's work:

You get a higher degree of accident risk on the journey to and from work [on a bike] *which may counterbalance the health benefits*[to some extent]. (West Australian, 10 February, 1984)

Even without the benefit of Mayer's quantification, it was obvious to me (in my naiveté), so I said it … and got away unchallenged! Perhaps there is such a thing as a 'universal truth acknowledged by all'.

Lesson number 3 was back with television, who wanted a bit of action. – an interview on a tandem, with myself at the front and the reporter behind. Bad enough trying to pay attention to the road and answer questions at the same time, but there were no radio microphones, so we were connected to the camera car by an 'umbilical cord' which must not stretch tight (or it would unplug) nor get slack (or it would wrap around the front wheel of the tandem). The reporter and I survived. I learned that riding a bike <u>does</u> become habitual so you can think at the same time. Perhaps the old saying "easy as falling off a bike" should be "easy as riding a bike" – certainly better for promoting cycling, as no one likes falling off.

Lesson number 4 came in talkback radio. Among the usual comments and questions, one caller accused me of being in the pay of the car companies because I was talking about on-road cycling rather than total segregation. If I had had my wits about me, I might have responded that the car companies <u>were</u> paying me – since they pay taxes and my salary was paid by taxpayers! An opportunity missed, and no one has given me this opening since.

3. THE PERILS OF BEING VISIBLE IN THE MEDIA

The first Bicycle Co-ordinator in Western Australia was appointed in 1978. The appointment was met with a lot of media interest and several newspaper stories with pictures were published. Peter Gralton did the right things, – wearing a helmet and high-visibility clothing – but was criticised publicly for not having a bell on his bicycle!

Twenty two years later, David Parkinson, a cyclist representative on the WA Bicycle Committee, having publicly entered the fray on the vexed topic of compulsory helmet wearing, was taken to task for his racing style of bike (which apparently implied that he rode too fast) – and for not having a bell on his bike! Plús ça change!

4. DEALING WITH THE BUREAUCRATS

Despite having worked mostly in the public sector, I had never been a public servant – and certainly never a bureaucrat. One co-director of the Perth Bikeplan was an arch-bureaucrat, with strong personal views conflicting with the 'every street is a bicycle street' approach. He also chaired the WA Bicycle Committee and described cyclists who on-road cyclists as 'semi-professional'.

He fell off his bike once and hit his head on the kerb, after which he was a strong proponent of helmets. It might also have contributed to his vehement rejection of on-road cycling – paths don't have kerbs to hit your head on.

I have a fairly anarchic view of getting things done, agreeing with Ricardo Semler (1993) at about the same time he was putting it into practice in Brazil. It was hardly surprising that the arch-bureaucrat and I should fall out.

The issue was one of 'following instructions' or 'accepting professional advice', depending upon one's viewpoint. There was clear divergence between the Perth Bikeplan team and the Chairman of the WA Bicycle Committee on fundamentals, including active provision for cyclists on-road. Several times this turned into open conflict at Bicycle Committee meetings, with the Bikeplan team being derided as having fallen under the 'spell' of one member who was a 'semi-professional cyclist'.

Despite repeated attempts, this conflict was not resolved, nor could I go round this person. Finally, I walked out of a meeting and subsequently resigned – but stayed to finalise the Perth Bikeplan. It wasn't a pre-meditated act, but it was the circuit-breaker required – the Perth Bikeplan report went to Government intact and has formed the basis of bicycle policy and programs since.

Walking out of meetings is not to be done often, but at the right time it can be very effective. It only works if you have credibility with others in the meeting and you are clearly not simply trying to score political points.

5. DEALING WITH THE CYCLISTS

Cyclists are as bad as any other group for having fixed ideas. The debate still raged, then, about segregation or integration, with all the fervour and righteousness that apartheid used to generate (Ker, 1984). This became an argument between accepting substandard 'sidewalk' facilities, to 'get away from traffic', and assertion of cyclists' rights to the road. It becomes easy for opponents to focus attention on disagreement rather than objectives.

Many cyclists are their own (and their fellow-cyclists') worst enemies. Irresponsible, inconsiderate and dangerous behaviour, especially ignoring traffic rules, provokes other road users to say that cyclists should not be on roads. On shared paths, pedestrians have a right to feel threatened by such behaviour. It does not help bicycle advocates or planners to have to counter negative perceptions instead of concentrating on the positives.

It would help if motorists knew the road rules. One advantage of a multi-disciplinary team including a traffic policeman is that you can sometimes bring a bit of pressure to bear on errant motorists. In 1984, I (almost literally) had a run-in with a driver who maintained that cyclists were not allowed on roads. As most cyclists (and pedestrians) know, you can't win this one on the spot – unless you carry a copy of the road laws with you (even so, winning can be worse than losing), but a visit from a Traffic Police sergeant has rather more effect.

Not everyone can have direct access to the 'long arm of the law', but it helps to have police involved in bicycle program development and implementation. Getting all police to enforce the traffic laws is rather more difficult.

6. DEALING WITH THE TRANSPORT PROFESSIONALS

Soon after falling out with the arch-bureaucrat, I wrote for the Bicycle Federation of Australia (Ker, 1986), a reflection on experience with the development and (at that stage, lack of) implementation of the Perth Bikeplan. It was also a response to Liz Ampt's article on planning as a substitute for action (Ampt 1984). Liz identifed three situations in which "implementation tends not to occur":

- when external factors intervene to change the conditions under which the plan was designed;
- when the plan was unworkable, as when it did not address the stated objectives or proposed unrealistic mechanisms;
- when the plan was foreseen, or came to be seen, as an end in itself.

My response to this was that, at least in the case of bikeplans:

…these situations are unduly simplistic and do not address the root causes of non-implementation or partial implementation. In fact, the question of partial implementation has been almost totally ignored, despite the crucial importance of full implementation of plans which emphasise an integrated engineering/behavioural programme.

… the most important reason for the general lack of full implementation of bikeplans in Australia lies with the inability of a significant number of those involved in the decision-making process to accept a bikeplan as an integrated package when one or more elements taken in isolation do not accord with views they have developed equally in isolation…(Ker, 1986, pp1/2)

This is particularly difficult when organisations are restructured. In the case of Bikewest, I could have been hoist with my own petard, having argued the need for a new model, including mainstreaming of bicycle programs (Ker, et al, 1996). Integration of planning and engineering functions into new 'integrated transport planning' and 'transport infrastructure management' groups has not, however, been at the expense of an integrated approach to cycle programs – the responsibility for this, as well as for promotional initiatives, has been retained by Bikewest.

The problem, however, is one that bedevils much of transport planning – ensuring that agreements reached at the policy level are actually followed through into implementation. Bicycle Committees do not usually have the decision-making powers to make sure this happens (and might well not have the will to do so). The original Bikewest model (Ker, et al, 1996) was designed to provide a focus for implementation, and is an appropriate first step, but has been overtaken by models to ensure integrated transport planning and a multi-modal approach to transport investment decision-making (TIP, 1999).

7. OF BICYCLE COMMITTEES

The Western Australian Bicycle Committee has always been a mix of agency representatives (Main Roads, Transport, Police, Education, Planning, Health), local government and users. It has not achieved its potential, for a number of reasons (Bike Ahead, 1996):

- lack of clarity, in the terms of reference or among representatives of agencies and interest groups, about the Committee's role;
- inability to address policy issues, the preference being to focus on the operational level, where issues are clearer but unlikely to be generalisable to provide guidance in other situations;
- a preference for 'managing' Bikewest, rather than a strategic advice role;
- agency representatives' lack of mandate to agree on behalf of their organisations, coupled with an inability to persuade the organisation to adopt any course of action that had been agreed by the committee; and
- a predilection for talking in anecdotes rather than substantive and logical argument – or *generalising from a random sample of one*.

  I recently addressed the WABC on whether helmets should be compulsory for riders of scooters, as proposed under the draft National Road Traffic Rules. This issue arose late in the process, so needed urgent resolution. The arguments, beyond the philosophical one of compulsion, related to whether there was actually a problem to which helmets were an effective solution, including issues of potential speed, level of conflicts where these were likely to be used and the method of falling compared to how one falls from (or with) a bicycle. Some contributions were at the level of "Well, I live on a hilly street and sometimes teenagers on scooters go racing past me", ignoring the fact that the method of propulsion and lack of gearing make a scooter intrinsically less capable of speed than a bicycle.

  Little seems to have changed since 1986 when *the combined effect…is that discussions can be based on inaccurate, anecdotal or irrelevant information* (BINSW, 1986).

8. DEALING WITH THE POLITICIANS

In many ways, politicians are the easiest group to deal with, as their objectives are more overt. As the European Cyclists' Federation knows, Velo City conferences provide a great platform for politicians to announce new initiatives for cycling. For Velo Australis, held in Fremantle in October 1996, planning for the announcement can be dated as far back as Velo Mondiale in Montreal in 1992.

The success of Velo Mondiale prompted two West Australians, Mike Maher (then working in Portland, Oregon) and myself, to ponder running something similar in Western Australia. After an 'ambush' of Olly Hatch in Nottingham in 1993, Mike and I found ourselves selling the idea (successfully, despite compulsory helmet laws) to the ECF in Vienna in 1994. A year later, we launched Velo Australis in Basle, Switzerland, with our Director General of Transport – who, coincidentally, was the person who 'enlisted' me in October 1983.

All this was undertaken with the full knowledge and support of the Minister for Transport, but I am forced to ask the rhetorical question of who was the more politically astute – the politician or the public servants?

The timing of Velo Australis was not accidental, but it did help being an 'off-year' for European-based Velo City conferences – and hence not competing with them. It also, it turned out, set up a 4-yearly cycle of which Velo Mondiale 2000 is the latest.

The critical factor was that a State election was due in Western Australia by May 1997. Even without Velo Australis, the revamping of the 1985 Perth Bikeplan (into the 'Bike Ahead' strategy (Transport 1996a)) and the Perth Bicycle Network (PBN) Plan (Transport, 1996b)) would have targeted the second half of 1996 to maximise the likelihood of incorporation into political platforms for the election.

It is not easy to ensure election commitments are actually funded – getting new initiatives through the normal State budgetary process is difficult, and 'lack of funding' can be an excuse for 'delaying' implementation. Velo Australis provided an international stage for the WA Premier and made the commitment to the PBN an international one subject to a greater degree of scrutiny.

What is not widely known is that the Premier committed to the $25 million Stage 1 of the PBN with no agreement on how it would be funded. However, once the announcement had been made (and repeated to the international audience at the formal opening of Velo Australis two weeks later), the die was cast and funding was found from the Main Roads budget – also giving Main Roads an incentive to be active in managing PBN projects, including the thorny issue of building cycle facilities in suburban rail reservations which are jealously guarded by Westrail – rail engineers are more likely to trust road engineers than cycle planners!

9. AGREEING TO DISAGREE

It will be rare to have total agreement on the details of any bicycle program. Even if such agreement were possible, it is unlikely to be maintained throughout the lengthy period of implementation.

I believe that planning, like politics, is the art of the possible. Seeking the optimum, particularly if it is only the optimum from <u>your</u> perspective, rapidly reaches diminishing returns. Whilst certain fundamentals cannot be compromised (such as cyclists' right to ride on the roadway and to have roads designed, constructed and maintained in a fit state for cycling), other matters are less critical. With limited resources to fight the war, advocates and planners must choose carefully when to fight and when to beat a strategic retreat – calculated risks in the context of balanced implementation of policies and plans.

Comprehensive bikeplans or bike strategies are the core of the Australian model of bicycle planning pioneered by Geelong, Victoria, in 1977 and subsequently adopted in most major Australian cities. If it applies to planning, it is even more imperative in implementation – an engineering strategy based on facilities for competent cyclists may fail spectacularly without initiatives to help cyclists develop the necessary level of competence.

10. ALIGNING INTERESTS: A COURSE OF ACTION

It is rare to align all interests in achieving outcomes for cyclists. It is even more rare that there is total alignment of interests against the cyclist. The trick is to plot a course around and between the obstacles in the way of achieving your objectives. <u>Influence</u> rather than <u>control</u> is the key – recognising that those who used to control are no longer able to do so.

As societies become increasingly complex, it is increasingly difficult for any group or groups to stand in the way of a movement with community support. The means of communication are so open and accessible that direct and immediate communication with decision-makers and advisers is almost the norm – no longer do you have to wait weeks for an appointment – send an e-mail or bombard him/her with e-mails. Cyclist groups have, in fact, adopted the potential of e-communication much faster and more effectively than the road lobbies, which are much more restricted by formal organisational structures.

Cities and towns, of which transport is but one part, are what is known as 'complex adaptive systems'. They change in ways that were recognised nearly a decade ago in Perth, when it was stated that: *the future is formed less by the grand edicts of planners or politicians than by the multitudes of decisions made by people as individuals and as members of organisations* (Future Perth, 1992). Such systems cannot be controlled; they can only be influenced or 'disturbed'. Very often the outcome will not be predictable and totally unforeseen (indeed, unforeseeable) outcomes can result from a combination of interventions.

Control is a high cost strategy, for it necessary to continue intervening to keep outcomes within the 'acceptable' range. Control strategies see the world in physical determinist terms, ignoring the potential for achieving outcomes through people. The emphasis is on 'building' and 'managing'; on large-scale infrastructure and traffic management systems.

Influence, on the other hand, creates change rather than maintain the status quo, empowering people to make decisions in ways that more closely align private and public interests. Such interventions are, in principle, self-sustaining – but the outcome will alter as circumstances and opportunities change.

Control strategies are inherently rigid and slow to adapt – road authorities have adopted the rhetoric of environmental responsibility, but there have been few real changes in what they do or the way they do it. Control is an essentially engineering view of the world, where a given stimulus produces a predictable response. Control is their own behavioural model, and it also is the core of most conventional transport planning tools.

Influencing strategies are fluid and difficult to track, never mind manage – outcomes are unpredictable. They do not endear themselves to engineers, planners, bureaucrats, politicians or organisations, for they are the stuff of the genuinely free market. They can also be remarkably effective, much to the discomfort of those same people.

11. WHAT TO DO?

Faced with a hostile environment and high level of inertia favouring the status quo, one would do well to heed the advice of one who, for many years fought against apartheid in South Africa. According to Geoffrey Clayton, Anglican Archbishop of Capetown from 1949 to 1957, one must:

- get one's objectives clear [ie know towards what end one is working];
- decide what is the next step; and
- if one cannot see clearly how to reach one's objective, *do the next right thing* (Paton, 1974, p116).

This advice throws great responsibility on the individual's conscience. Whilst the advice is not very specific, there are two obvious implications. First, one must initiate and wholeheartedly support policies and projects that further the objectives. Second, one must resist, with all the resources available, policies and projects that are contrary to those objectives.

In some ways this is trite stuff – bicycle activists have acted in this way for years.. Unfortunately , those charged with the responsibility for implementation of policies and programs affecting cyclists have often been either unable or unwilling to stand up and be counted. There are two very real dangers in acting contrary to one's objectives, for whatever reason: one is losing the confidence of those affected by the actions; the other is losing the confidence of those who directed that the actions be carried out. Neither is conducive to the eventual achievement of objectives for which one is working.

The greatest service that any of us can provide is to keep ourselves honest and actively encourage others to follow the same path.

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