



Peddling pedalling

AT 7.30 every morning the bike path in East Perth is a flurry of wheels and glowing faces with hundreds of people on their bikes making their way into the city for another day of work.

This is a scene being repeated in South Perth, Leederville, Victoria Park, Fremantle and all around the metropolitan area. And it will be repeated this afternoon.

The Perth Bike Network is experiencing massive growth in usage. A combination of a desire for physical activity, the rising costs of petrol and congestion in buses and trains; more people are taking the choice of a sustainable and fun option to get around our city. From 1998- 2010 there has been a greater than 500 per cent uptake of people cycling.

Illegally

Yet despite Perth's good start with the network of bike paths, the state government is missing out on opportunities to extend and improve it. There are many locations in Perth where the network simply stops or riders are forced onto busy roads or illegally onto footpaths.

Thanks to the Greens' negotiations in the Senate, \$40 million in last year's economic stimulus package was allocated to building cycle infrastructure nationally – money that would not otherwise have been spent. However, of this WA received, only \$2.8 million, and much

more is needed.

In 2007 the state government spent \$126,000 employing a consultant to canvass users of the Perth Bike Network and review the potential implementation of further infrastructure. It finished this in early 2008.

Two and half years later we are still waiting for the government to release the final report. No drafts have been made available for the public to view.

According to Bicycle Transportation Alliance spokesperson Heinrich Benz: "Not only do we have to complete the original vision of the Bike Network as envisaged in 1993, we have to build a system that can cope with many more cyclists than we currently have."

Perth is facing enormous growth in population and having to deal with traffic congestion that will result. The Perth Bike Network is a cheap and sustainable way to get people off the choked freeways and into active transport. Riding to work promotes productivity and healthy lifestyles, and in Perth with its beautiful scenery, mild climate and few hills, is a lot of fun.

What is needed is investment in bicycle paths that provides for the current growth and encourages more people to get out of cars and into active transport.

A recent AECOM Consultants' report into Sydney inner-city regional bicycle


network demonstrated an economic return to NSW of \$3.88 for every dollar invested in cycling infrastructure. The RAC recognises traffic congestion as a key economic impediment and acknowledges bicycle infrastructure as an ideal complement.

We need to finally complete the bike path to Midland, and fill the gaps in the network to Armadale. The Hutton Street/ Mitchell Freeway intersection must rate as one of the biggest disincentives for cyclists travelling from the northern suburbs. The Cottesloe and Leighton Beach section of the bike path has been crying out for completion for years.

There is a lot to be positive about. The City of Perth is building its bike plan to make the central city more friendly for people who ride there on bikes; local governments across Perth are adding small sections of bikepaths to the network; Bikewest coordinates the agencies that try to apply cycling policy and actions; and, NGO groups like the Bicycle Transportation Alliance talk to them all to get some strategic implementation.

The time is right to make lasting improvement to the network. The Perth Bicycle Network was once the leading example in Australia, and it is being left behind by a government that is more interested in building highways through wetlands than creating a safe and efficient transport alternative for Perth commuters.



 **ALISON XAMON** is an upper house Greens MP for the east metropolitan region. In this week's **SPEAKER'S CORNER** she calls on the Barnett government to get cracking with finishing the Perth Bike Network.