



# NEWS FEATURE

NATIONAL CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION  
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## BICYCLE TRACKS

For some time the National Capital Development Commission has been examining ways of introducing a system of bicycle paths to Canberra. Although there is a great deal of overseas experience to draw on, a great many questions remain unanswered and the best way to learn Canberra's needs in this field appears to be the construction of a pilot bicycle track.

Using the information available, the Commission is now preparing a draft brief for the development of the concept and in doing so it will be consulting organisations such as the National Fitness Council, the A.C.T. Council of Parents & Citizens Associations, the Society for Social Responsibility and Science, the Canberra Amateur Cycling Club and others with an interest.

Pedestrian path systems have been built into suburbs over a number of years. In some places provision has been made for cyclists by making pedestrian paths wider than they would normally have had to be but no formal system of separate bicycle paths has been built to date. It has been planned, however, for some years. In Tuggeranong, for example, there will be facilities for cyclists on a town scale.

Ultimately the Commission hopes to have a multi-purpose trail system throughout the Canberra region, taking advantage of the broad parkway reservations to include pedestrian, cycling and equestrian trails, mainly for recreational purposes.



Philosophically there are many advantages in the wide community use of the bicycle and virtually no disadvantages; but there are practical problems. It is often argued that where traffic is dense enough to be a real hazard the "obvious" solution is to build cycle paths. This is done in many countries - why not here? The immediate reply is that conditions are different here. Other countries, like Holland, are very flat; commuting distances are shorter; the bicycle's popularity has survived the age of the motor car and large numbers of people use them. There are other differences.

One of the greatest obstacles is finance. Cycle paths cost between \$5,000 and \$10,000 a mile to build. This cost depends on whether or not overpasses and underpasses are required, and demands for expenditure on public facilities always conflict with one another; usually the successful demand is the one backed by a demonstrated and widespread public need. In Canberra, no widespread need for bicycle tracks has been shown to exist. There is clearly a demand of some sort but its extent is difficult to assess with any real accuracy.

Good arguments exist, however, in favour of path construction despite the high cost and the uncertainty of demand. The main ones are safety factors and health-oriented. And there are many others: bicycles are cheap and do not pollute; the energy they use is renewable, where motor fuel is not; they require a fraction of the parking space cars need; they probably could never cause traffic congestion; and so on.

But there are relatively few bicycles in Canberra, and experience elsewhere indicates that even if a network of paths were built the effect on numbers of bicycles bought and used on them would be very slight, despite the common assertion that "you can't tell how many people would use bikes until you make it safe for them to do so."



These arguments create a dilemma. The only sound argument against the creation of a complete network of cycle paths is economic; all the non-economic ones are in favour of such a plan. The established facts are:

- . Extremely few Canberra people cycle to work; a survey in Phillip showed that of 363 workers (200 of them living in Woden-Weston Creek) only one cycled to work.
- . Many school pupils cycle to school and other places; recently a survey showed that about 40% of Woden high-school pupils used bicycles and, throughout Canberra, 25% of government high school pupils and 19% of those attending independent high schools ride to school; 12% of all primary-school pupils do the same.
- . Fewer than 3% of university students cycle to the campus.
- . Recreational cycling appears to be growing gradually in popularity with all age-groups in all European countries.
- . Competitive cyclists live in Canberra but only in the usual (quite small) numbers.
- . Experience elsewhere shows that most of those who own bicycles use them only in relatively flat places and then only to go short distances - perhaps two miles.

Because of the high cost, among other things, of providing even a pilot bicycle path system, it would be prudent to build it where it would get the most use. Obviously that would be in an area where there are plenty of things giving rise to short trips such as work places, recreation areas, sporting facilities, shops and schools. Logically, also, the place should be in a relatively flat area and in one where population density is relatively high. It would also be no more than two miles long.



At present there are very few places which meet all these requirements but North Canberra could be a suitable area for the pilot track. The land is relatively flat, what could be a ready-made reservation for part of the system is available along Sullivans Creek, and most if not all of the other requirements seem to exist there.

This, however, does not define precisely where the pilot track will be or what its final shape will be or what it will serve. The main reason for inviting representatives of interested groups to discuss this with the Commission is to get their advice on these very things. Among other things, they will be asked their views on what the objectives ought to be in building a pilot bicycle track; they will be asked to suggest what alternatives exist for the precise layout and location of the track and then settle on one; and they will be asked to suggest ways of encouraging its use by the public at large.

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