

The Hon Nathan Rees, M.P.
Premier of New South Wales
Governor Macquarie Tower
Sydney 2000

by hand

Wednesday, 8th October 2008

Dear Mr Rees

NSW Coastline Cycleway - bicycles for transport

May I first of all congratulate you on your election as Premier. I have a feeling that you will do very well and I wish you all the best.

I am now writing to ask for your support in efforts to speed up the development of the NSW Coastline Cycleway. I first had a meeting in 1974 with Tom Uren, the then Minister for Urban & Regional Development in the Federal Government. He was very supportive, and Federal funds were provided for what was the first, though very short, new stretch actually built of what was eventually to be the "NSW Coastline Cycleway". This was in Nowra in 1976. But then, with the fall of the Whitlam government, nothing more of the sort happened; until, eventually, after decades of badgering, the State's RTA in 1993 agreed to fund the first of what ended up as five Study reports delineating, and costing, a route along the entire 1400 km non-metropolitan length of the NSW coastline. However, the RTA (the State's main source of bicycle funding) subsequently declared the project to be "long-term"; with its development largely stalled ever since.

The idea for the project first came to me when I was staying with friends in a community a few km north of Coffs Harbour. With no public transport and with the adjoining Pacific Highway far too dangerous for cycling, I found children and others without cars unable independently to get to town safely. Local air photos showed a local road going south, but it stopped short of town. Then, on looking at maps of the whole NSW coast, I came across a remarkable phenomenon: the coastline was studded with communities all within about 20km of one another - a reasonable cycling distance - for nearly its entire length, embracing the great majority of the State's population (see attachmt 'A', NSW settlement pattern). To link all these together seemed logical, in the process creating wherever possible safe cycleways to schools, shops and other facilities and developing a bicycle culture along the whole non-metropolitan coast.

Bicycle NSW, the State's primary bicycle advocacy body, was involved in the fifth and final (Far North Coast) Study, backed by the Department of Planning which had already joined the RTA in funding earlier Studies. In 2003, Andrew Refshauge as Minister for Planning formally recognized the Cycleway as a "visionary project", awarding it a grant of \$15 million spread over 10 years and placing it under the control of the Department of Planning. However, too soon afterwards, both he and the Premier, Bob Carr (who had written to me expressing his close support for cycling), both suddenly retired, being replaced by Ministers less interested - who even set about reducing the already meager funding for bicycles in the RTA's budget. (Meanwhile, more cycles than cars have been sold in Australia for the past 8 years running; whilst a recent new town in Holland has bicycles comprising 44% of all short [under 7 km] daily trips - couldn't we at least aim for, say, 10% ?)

To get things moving, I would like to suggest as a first step that top priority and preferential treatment be announced for the quick completion of a Basic Framework (see attachmt 'B'). This in itself as a start could come to involve the Federal government, private Corporations and even individuals (assuming a tax deductible allowance). At present, some 300 km of the non-metropolitan route has been completed, and, with only about 20 km now being added each year, the remaining 1,100 km will be a long wait. Instead, I suggest that, with our unique coastal settlement pattern, now is the time to complete this Cycleway, thus quickly creating both a lucrative tourist attraction of international significance and, at the same time, a catalyst for the increased use of bicycles for transport everywhere in NSW (see attachmt 'C'). Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,

Elias Duek-Cohen, LFPIA (Life Fellow Planning Institute Australia)

(cc. to relevant Ministerial colleagues, etc.)