

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE

Seventh Report — “Further Along the Path: The development and implementation of the Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan” — Tabling

DR A.D. BUTI (Armada) [10.06 am]: I present for tabling the seventh report of the Public Accounts Committee titled “Further Along the Path: The development and implementation of the Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan”.

[See paper 1994.]

Dr A.D. BUTI: I commence by quoting Dan Lipinski, a member of the United States House of Representatives. He states —

Cycling is not only a personal passion for me, but it is something that simply makes sense to expand transportation options ... It is good for the health of our nation, the environment, the development of our communities, and is one of the keys to addressing the ongoing challenges that come with urban congestion.

It is therefore a very important public policy issue any time we talk about improving the infrastructure and the options for cycling for our citizens.

Before I continue, I would like to thank my fellow committee members on the Public Accounts Committee: the deputy chair, the member for Bateman, who is a very keen cyclist and former transport minister, so of course this area is of particular interest to him; the member for Bicton; the member for Mount Lawley; and the member for North West Central, for their professionalism and diligence in arriving at this report. Further, on behalf of the committee I would like to thank our very hardworking and talented secretariat, principal research officer Mr Timothy Hughes, and research officer Mr Michael Burton, for their excellent assistance and support. I mentioned that the deputy chair is a keen cyclist. I would like to mention that the members for Bateman, Dawesville, Thornlie and the Deputy Premier, the Minister for Health, will be participating in the 2019 Ride Against Domestic Violence as part of the WA parliamentary team. I will also be participating, but in another team. So well done—we cannot all fit in one team.

Returning to this report: bikes can be life-changing machines and cycling can be a life-changing experience. Riding a bike can have a huge impact on someone’s life, making them healthier and happier. Cycling, like most forms of exercise, can boost both a person’s physical fitness and their mental state. Doing exercises, even with moderate intensity, can help improve a person’s self-esteem and mood, reduce stress and prevent depression. Although riding a bike to work and back home would normally not be as fast as using the car, in some circumstances people might actually save time. Heavy traffic jams make cycling a better option, not to mention the time and money saved finding a parking bay. These are just some of the individual benefits of cycling. There are also societal benefits from having a healthier and fitter society and benefits for the natural and built environment if people ride more and use their cars less frequently. There are also intangible social benefits. The car that provides insulated glass and closed mobility does not really help us build social and community links. Neighbours do not know the families surrounding them and they only ever pass by in a blur. Frustrated and anonymous drivers curse one another for engaging in silly, inconsiderate or unsafe manoeuvres. For those reasons it would be great if more people cycled to work, school and the shop. We might find more time to talk to each other and inspire others to get on a bike to enjoy the great outdoors.

Of course, some people hesitate to take up cycling for fear of having to share the road with another moving object—a fast and more powerful machine, that being the car. That is why providing a safe environment for cyclists is critical to encourage more people to get on their bikes. One way to make people safer on bikes is to provide appropriate cycling infrastructure. This reinforces the importance of implementing and achieving the objectives of the “Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan 2014–2031”. Released by the Department of Transport in March 2014, the plan aims to make cycling in Western Australia safe, connected, convenient and a widely accepted form of transport. To achieve these objectives, the plan recognises that a comprehensive network of well-constructed and maintained bike paths is fundamental. The vision within the Western Australian bicycle network plan is to double bicycle trips in Perth by 2019 by prioritising the completion of bike paths within 15 kilometres of central Perth and encouraging local governments to implement their own complementary cycle infrastructure plans. These are important objectives because they address deficiencies identified by the Auditor General in a 2015 performance audit into the quality and adequacy of cycling infrastructure in the Perth metropolitan area. Titled “Safe and Viable Cycling in the Perth Metropolitan Area”, the audit report focused on the work of the Department of Transport, Main Roads and the Road Safety Commission to make cycling a safe and viable mode of transport. In the report, the Auditor General found that, although government had gradually improved Perth cycling infrastructure, better planning, sustained funding and cooperation of local government authorities was needed to complete a safe and viable cycle network. In light of those findings, the Auditor General

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made four recommendations aimed at improving the planning, funding and progress reporting for cycling infrastructure projects, enhancing data collection and analysis on cycling participation and safety, and increasing collaboration between state and local governments in the provision of cycling infrastructure, all with the ultimate goal of fully integrating cycling as a safe and viable Perth transport option.

Noting the time that has elapsed since the audit report in June, the Public Accounts Committee asked the Department of Transport and Main Roads what they had done to address the audit report's recommendations. The committee's report contains an analysis of the agencies' responses. The four recommendations involved nine actions. Although the agencies have commenced work on each of the nine actions, we believe only three have been fully addressed. We acknowledge the positive attitude taken by the agencies towards addressing the Auditor General's recommendations. In particular, we commend the Department of Transport for its initiative in publishing a status update as part of its response to the audit report. We would be pleased to see other agencies follow this lead as an early response to performance audit reports. We also acknowledge the agencies' actions in addressing network planning, which is recommendation 3a, and promoting the use of new and existing infrastructure to improve cycling participation rates, which is recommendation 4.

However, some work remains to be done on other recommendations of the Auditor General. Better integration of state and local government bike paths into a coherent, overall network remains the greatest outstanding challenge. We believe the Department of Transport should exercise greater leverage over local government authorities while approving Perth and regional bike network grants to ensure that cyclepaths are built to consistently high standards. Similarly, grants under the State Road Funds to Local Government Agreement should also seek to incorporate objectives outlined in the "Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan 2014–2031". The Department of Transport and Main Roads should also provide local government authorities with detailed guidance on planning, designing, constructing and maintaining local cycling infrastructure. Since the release of the WA bicycle network plan and the Auditor General's audit report, the popularity of cycling has seen it become a more critical part of our transport mix, and there are many members in this chamber who cycle regularly. In May this year, the state government made a \$134.5 million commitment for cycling infrastructure initiatives. This is a positive measure to make cycling a safer and more viable transport option in the Perth metropolitan area. Of course, with this increased public funding, the WA bicycle network plan will assume greater prominence and will undoubtedly receive increased scrutiny to ensure its objectives are achieved.

If I can just summarise some of the points of the report, I think it is a great initiative of the department to have a status update on the way it is responding to the Auditor General's report. We strongly advise other agencies to do so. This is a very positive move. The government's commitment earlier this year of \$134.5 million to help with cycling infrastructure initiatives is also welcome, and the department has stated that that should allow practical completion of the principal shared path network within 15 kilometres of the CBD by 2022. Also important—this is outlined in the report—is the need for better data collection by the department. We encourage the department to work with Western Australian universities that have researchers in this area to obtain better data on how people are using pathways and the need for shared pathways and principal pathways in cycling infrastructure. However, probably the greater challenge, and what is really critical if we are to build a cycle-friendly city, is to ensure better integration and cooperation between the Department of Transport, Main Roads and local government authorities. Shared cyclepaths in local government areas are of varying qualities and people often have to come to a sudden halt and move onto and share the road with moving objects, being cars, trucks or buses. That is a great challenge and the department has to look very carefully at how it can improve that. As the report states, it can use the leverage of the funding that it provides local governments to ensure that local governments build high-quality cycling infrastructure that is very well connected and interconnected with the paths that are under the control of the Department of Transport. Obviously, the fact that the government has now committed an extra \$134.5 million means that the department also has to be very vigilant and monitor the proper use of the funds being provided by the government.

In my remaining minutes, which I may not use, I want to refer to an article, I think it was on *WAtoday*, headed "Bike city, great city: How Vancouver can inspire a better Perth", by Chris Bruntlett. I am not sure how many members here have been to Vancouver; it is a fantastic city. I will quote from part of this article —

In 2008, when Vancouver's newly elected mayor proposed taking out a general traffic lane of a busy city bridge and replacing it with a protected bike lane, some pundits predicted it would be the end, not just the beginning, of his political career.

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Not only did everything turn out fine, but Burrard Bridge—which now sees more than a million bike crossings per year—proved to be the first piece in a robust network of AAA ("all ages and abilities") infrastructure that has transformed Vancouver for the better. A decade later, cycling is the fastest growing

mode of transport in Vancouver—up 300 per cent in that period. Today, 10 per cent of Vancouver residents bike to work. The most striking changes, however, have been qualitative.

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As of last year, 50 per cent of trips in the City of Vancouver are made by active means (foot, bike, or public transport). The target came a full three years ahead of schedule, with a goal to reach two-thirds by 2030.

Vancouver has many similarities to Perth (and most cities in Canada, the US and Australia) having long followed the pattern of sprawling suburbs and car-oriented street design.

The experience of Vancouver, however, shows that change is not only possible, it's preferable.

Vancouver proves that cities that work better for walking and biking, also work better for living: Streets become safer and less congested, expanded transport options give people more choice and promote greater independence for children, for seniors and everyone in between.

Regardless of whether you take to two wheels or not, fewer cars in city streets mean everyone benefits from an increased quality of life. It truly can be a win-win scenario.

The people of Perth aren't much different from those in Vancouver. We know the West Australian community wants safer streets, more connected communities, high quality public spaces, more street trees and greater choice in mobility options.

All that's needed is bold leaders to step up to the challenge and deliver it.

I think that is very pertinent to the way forward for Western Australia as we try to implement the plan initiated by the previous government in 2014. The Auditor General has identified some deficiencies in the moving forward of that plan. We hope the injection of funding by this government will assist. But I reiterate that the connection and the leadership the Department of Transport and Main Roads Western Australia have to play with local governments is so important. As the member for Armadale, it would be remiss of me not to mention that it is of particular concern in the outlying metropolitan areas of Perth. It is there where the issue of safe cycleways is probably most needed and is of greatest deficiency. They are generally very well catered for in the inner city regions, around the river and along the coastline, but in the outer metropolitan areas, that is where often people want to get on a bike, but they have to share it with a faster moving and heavier object. Therefore, the way for this government and following governments to ensure people in the outlying areas are not suffering or are not neglected is to ensure that governments work very closely and have leverage over local government authorities in this area.

MR D.C. NALDER (Bateman) [10.23 am]: I stand in support of the comments made by the Chair of the Public Accounts Committee, the member for Armadale. I believe his comments and the report speak for themselves. I would like to venture a little further into the subject of cycling because I think a few people in this house know my interest in cycling, having done a bit around the City of Perth for the last few years.

Mr C.J. Tallentire: It's 9 000 kilometres.

Mr D.C. NALDER: I will come to that, member for Thornlie. I have to admit that the member for Thornlie and I—I use the member for Thornlie as inspiration for my cycling, just quietly; Strava and the member for Thornlie are two of the little inspirations I have—are on track for a combined 20 000 kilometres this year of cycling around Perth. I have a particular interest in what has occurred in Western Australia with our focus on cycling, particularly in the Perth metropolitan area. I am passionate about Perth; I believe it is one of the best cities in the world, having travelled quite extensively. We have a fantastic city. If it is not the best, it is one of the best cities in the world and we want it to continue to be so. In order to do that, we need to continue to look at how this city can improve and look to other parts of the world to see what they do great that would make our city even greater. I believe improved cycling infrastructure and support for cycling around the metropolitan area would add to the liveability, if that is a word, for Perth.

In reflecting on what we have, it is important to look at where we have come from. It is fair to say that over recent years, there has been an attempt to improve cycling infrastructure and, in more recent times, little things have occurred that a lot of people would not know about. For example, principal shared paths have changed from a width of three metres to four metres. Little things like that allow better flow of traffic. We are starting to see the separation of pedestrians from cyclists in high-density areas such as around South Perth. Those little things are important because it has been unsafe not only for cyclists on roads but also for pedestrians on principal shared paths. These are the sorts of things we need to continue to focus on to continue to improve. I have concerns about cyclists often travelling at speed on our PSPs coming in from Canning Bridge to the Narrows Bridge, particularly in winter months when it is still dark. Some of those challenges are there for the future.

In talking about this I want to acknowledge—I have awareness of this because of my time as a former Minister for Transport—particular people within the Department of Transport who have made it a focus and a positive. This report shows their keen interest to follow up on the audit reports and make sure they are improving it. I would like

acknowledge people such as Steve Beyer, Craig Wooldridge and Jim Krynen. Jim is a legend in the community for his cycling prowess as a younger person. Their passion for cycling has supported the Department of Transport in ensuring these improvements occur and the focus on how to make it better for Western Australia. During my time as transport minister, Craig Wooldridge went to the Netherlands and people came across from the Netherlands to look at what could be done in Western Australia to improve. All these aspects really do help with where we go and where we need to look.

In looking at where we have come from, it is important to think about where we are going. I believe the state government has done a great job in looking at the main linkages between communities—linking the freeways and railway lines. Although there are still gaps and areas we can improve, a lot of work has been done and is being done to make that even better. We have to look beyond major freeways and major railway lines. This government and future governments need to look at major linkages. Although we are dualling Armadale Road, we should ensure there is adequate cycle infrastructure that links Armadale through to Kwinana Freeway and for the PSPs to allow that movement. I know the standing committee chair, the member for Armadale, would support those types of linkages. Over time we will have to dual more of these major linkages because they are major freight or traffic corridors. Separating cyclists from them will become even more important; but they will provide better linkages in the future between communities.

Another thing I have become more aware of recently through groups on Twitter constantly bringing up issues is the standard of lighting we see on our principal shared paths. I have gone out at night and noticed that if I ride between Canning Bridge and beyond Mount Henry Bridge, parts of our network are very dark. From a safety perspective, not just for cycling but for walkers, we need to potentially look to establish a standard for lighting on our principal shared path network to make it an even safer environment in the evenings for everyone concerned. The state government has done this work, and the point I am about to make is to reinforce the comments made by the chair of the committee in his speech. Although the state government is focused on the linkages between communities, the activity that occurs within a community is also critical, such as how people, from their homes, access schools, shops and the PSPs that link communities. Getting that connectivity within a community is also important. Recently, the Minister for Transport announced local government funding for local roads. Although this report recommends that the government should commit a certain percentage of major infrastructure funds to cycling, in providing this funding to local governments, the state government and the Minister for Transport should look to providing encouragement for a certain percentage of that to go to cycling infrastructure within those communities to help these local communities improve their connectivity within the broader network.

As I said, it is important to understand where we have come from. There has been a lot of great work by previous governments, but particularly by the staff within the Department of Transport with the focus that they have provided. It is fantastic to see the way that they have acknowledged the Auditor General's reports and the transparency of the work that they are doing to improve the network. I believe that there are areas that we can continue to improve and it is important that we all acknowledge those to see what can be done to make them even better. I would like to thank the members of the committee for their time and also the committee staff; the principal research officer, Tim Hughes; and the research officer, Mr Michael Burton, for their support of the committee in preparing this response.

MRS L.M. O'MALLEY (Bicton) [10.31 am]: I rise to briefly speak to the seventh report of the Public Accounts Committee titled, "Further Along the Path: The development and implementation of the Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan". This is the second report to be tabled in this house on the committee's follow-up of agency responses to the Auditor General's reports. Listening to the member who spoke before me, I am reminded of a friend who was involved in a high-speed bicycle versus pedestrian accident. Unfortunately, he was the pedestrian. It serves to illustrate the point the member was making about the principal shared pathways as a particular issue of the network. I am pleased to report that he made a full recovery, but it was not a nice incident for either involved. I would like to begin by acknowledging and thanking the committee chair, the member for Armadale; and fellow committee members: the deputy chair, the member for Bateman; and the members for Mount Lawley and North West Central. I would also like to thank and acknowledge the extraordinarily hardworking secretariat of Mr Tim Hughes and Mr Michael Burton. I feel incredibly privileged to be part of this team and to have the opportunity to make my contribution to the work of this committee.

Bike networks connect and activate our communities. Put simply, they are an important way to get people moving. Why is that important? It is because when people move their bodies more often, positive things happen. Physical movement promotes better physical and mental health outcomes and when this is associated with an outdoor pursuit such as cycling, additional social benefits are to be gained from interactions with others and our natural environment. Significant factors contribute to the promotion of healthy communities and are an important mechanism for reducing the burden on our health system as it relates to preventable diseases. Additional benefits include the reduction of roadway congestion as more people choose more often to get out of their cars and onto a bike. This in turn leads to a reduction in environmental impacts that are created every time we journey by car.

Fewer car trips equals less emissions. Many economic and social benefits are to be found in creating healthier communities. Although geographic and other differences are reflected within individual communities, there is a common theme throughout: healthy communities are active and connected communities. A safe and viable bicycle network is a vital component of this.

How far along the path are we to a fully integrated, safe and viable bicycle network? The Department of Transport released the “Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan: 2014–2031” in March 2014. It outlined a vision to double bicycle trips in Perth by 2019 by making cycling a safe, connected, convenient and widely accepted form of transport. For these goals to be achieved, it was acknowledged that the provision of a comprehensive network of well-constructed and maintained bike paths would be fundamental. Our inquiries have found that positive outcomes are being achieved, with the transport agencies of Main Roads and the Department of Transport having taken steps in response to the Auditor General’s recommendations. It is very encouraging to see a review of cycling being undertaken across the broader transport portfolio. There has been an increase in resources devoted to cycling as well as a greater emphasis placed on planning the use of those resources, including looking at mechanisms for data collection and opportunities presented through partnership with tertiary institutions and local government authorities.

I would like to conclude by acknowledging the efforts of local government authorities as the responsible agencies for much of the bicycle network system throughout our state. There are many great opportunities for a stronger partnership between the state and local government in achieving the vision set out by the Western Australian bicycle network plan. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the commitment of the local government authorities that are undertaking work on bike networks in their local areas in partnership with the Department of Transport. In particular, I would like to congratulate one of my local government authorities, the City of Melville, which has received funding from the Department of Transport to create a series of safe, active streets linking the Garden City Shopping Centre and Riseley Street activity centre. This report highlights the importance of partnerships, such as the one with the City of Melville, for the success of the WABN plan, along with the other recommendations of the Auditor General’s report of improved planning, funding and progress reporting for cycling infrastructure projects, and enhancing data collection and analysis on cycling participation and safety. We are indeed further along the path, and with the continued focus of the responsible agencies on these recommendations, we can reach the ultimate goal of cycling as a fully integrated safe and viable Perth transport option. I commend this report to the house.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley) [10.37 am]: I thank my fellow members of the committee for their comments on this report and I echo their gratitude to other members of the committee and also to our secretariat, Tim Hughes and Michael Burton. A lot of the relevant subject matter has already been covered in the contributions from the chair and the members for Bateman and Bicton, all three of whom are keen cyclists and who made that apparent during the course of committee deliberations. I want to say only a couple of things. Firstly, being the member for Mount Lawley is a great privilege and I am well aware of the proximity of our neighbourhood to the CBD. This is what encourages so many residents in our local suburbs to commute to work along bike paths through the suburbs of Yokine, Mt Lawley and Dianella. We have some great Perth bike network paths throughout our neighbourhood. North east 1 runs through Coolbinia and Yokine, past Yokine reserve along Bradford Street; north east 27 connects Menora to Mt Lawley; north east 8 goes all the way through Mt Lawley and Inglewood to Bedford; north east 26 runs through Highgate and Mt Lawley parallel to the railway line, all the way to Embleton; and north east 6 runs from Dianella to the Maylands peninsula. All of these are well patronised bike paths. They are well maintained and they are a great asset in our local community. I think it is because of the esteem in which cycling is now held and because of the prevalence of cycling in society that I was very pleased to be part of the McGowan government and its commitment to cycling investment. The chair of the committee has already mentioned the substantial commitment that has been made by the McGowan government. The Minister for Transport, Rita Saffioti, on 16 May 2018 said —

- Since elected, the McGowan Government has committed \$157 million to new bike and pedestrian paths, as part of an integrated transport plan
- The State Budget includes a total allocation of more than \$134 million over the next four years

We can see that one of the things that is required to maintain the excellent cycle paths we have in Perth and Western Australia is continued investment, and that is why I am proud to be part of the McGowan government, with its commitment to doing just that.

As other members have said, there are incredible benefits. The Minister for Transport also said —

“Across the board there are huge benefits in allowing Western Australians to more easily ride their bikes, as part of the State’s integrated transport plan.

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“This record funding will provide safe and continuous riding ... facilities that will provide opportunities for those who want to ride their bike for leisure or as part of their daily commute.

As I said, there are many people in Mt Lawley who do just that. The minister also stated —

“One of the impediments to greater participation in cycling, for both commuting and recreation, is the disconnected nature of cycle path infrastructure.

That brings me to the third point I want to make. It seems that all members of the committee are ad idem on this point: there needs to be greater integration between the state government and local councils in creating that infrastructure. I commend the chair for his particular comment. He said —

Better integrating state and local government bike paths into a coherent overall network remains the greatest outstanding challenge. We believe that the Department of Transport should exercise greater leverage over Local Government Authorities when approving Perth and Regional Bike Network grants to ensure that cycle paths are built to a consistently high standard.

That is a commendable and laudable position for us to adopt. That is what a responsible state government should do.

All of that covers a lot of what has already been canvassed by my fellow committee members. I want to draw the attention of the house to some particular findings and recommendations we made on data capture and data gathering. If members have the time to review this excellent report, which I would recommend, it states, at paragraph 2.26 —

While it is encouraging to see the DoT exploring options such as phone trace data, local researchers have demonstrated that opportunities exist to explore other data gathering and analysis strategies.

Paragraph 2.27 states —

One example we have become aware of involves some innovative work by researchers at Edith Cowan University (ECU). In 2015, *The West Australian* reported on a study where ECU's School of Science had analysed 2013 data collected through the use of the Strava mobile fitness application.

The member for Bateman mentioned that in his contribution; I thought he was going to take it further, but it is a relevant point. Paragraph 2.27 continues —

In commenting on the research, the reporter observed that:

Though [the research] has confirmed the growing popularity of cycling in Perth, it has also found many riders using back streets instead of dedicated bike paths on busy roads.

We have taken that issue and we have made some findings. Finding 5 states —

It appears that the Department of Transport relies primarily on the use of expensive static counters to gather data on cycling participation and network use.

Finding 6 states —

Researchers at Edith Cowan University have undertaken research into cycling participation and network use that might usefully inform the execution of *Western Australian Bicycle Network Plan 2014–2031* activities.

Having made those findings, the committee made the following recommendation—recommendation 5, which states —

The Department of Transport should increase its level of engagement with universities across Western Australia to develop innovative solutions that seek to address the challenge of collecting and analysing data associated with cycling participation and network use.

As ECU is located in my electorate and local community of Mt Lawley, I want to commend it for the work it does and to make that recommendation known.

It is fair to say that there are some sceptics on cycling, none of whom are on the committee. To those people, perhaps I can finish my contribution by quoting no less than Albert Einstein. Einstein wrote a letter to his son, Eduard, on 5 February 1930, in which he talked about cycling. He said —

Beim Menschen ist es wie beim Velo. Nur wenn er faehrt, kann er bequem die Balance halten.

Which means, “It is the same with people as it is with riding a bike. Only when moving can one comfortably maintain one’s balance.”

On that note, I conclude my contribution. Thank you.