

Key Note Address
At The Official Opening Of The 2006 Velo Mondial International Bicycle
Conference In Cape Town

JEFF RADEBE, MP
Minister Of Transport
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Master of Ceremonies,
Minister of Tourism and Modernization in Ghana, Minister Jake Obetsebi-
Lampsey,
Minister of Works, Housing and Communications in Uganda, Minister Andruale
Awuzu,
Members of the Transport Portfolio Committee in the National Assembly,
MEC of Transport and Public Works in the Western Cape, Mr. Marius Fransman,
MEC of Environmental Affairs, Development Planning and Economic
Development in the Western Cape, Ms Tasneem Essop,
Mayors and Councillors,
Delegates, guests, and all friends of bicycle transport,
Ladies and gentlemen

We are honoured as a country to be hosting Velo Mondial Cape Town 2006. I
agree with the organisers when they say that this is the world's most
comprehensive bicycle planning conference. To everyone who travelled from
different parts of the world and the country to attend this conference in the
beautiful Cape, we welcome you and hope that you enjoy your stay.

AfriBike online Breaking news, a newsletter of a bicycle NGO wrote: "Raditsela lives on the outskirts of the non-descript, desert-like farming town of Ottosdal in the North West Province (South Africa). He works as a miner at the hot and dusty Witpoort pyrophyllite Quarry 10km away. Until the retro 'green alternative' arrived in August 2003, he and his fellow 22 colleagues were dependant on local taxi services to get to work. More commonly they would walk or hitch a ride if they were lucky, as the pricey R12 return journey is simply unaffordable. Fortunately, it was after Peter Ringdahl, the raw materials manager of the mine, heard about Afribike, that the Witpoort Quarry team's lives would change. A plan was hatched and twenty-two of quintessential Swedish bikes, the green Kronan commuter bike, precariously packed onto the back of Peter's bakkie were delivered. There where whoops and whistles of excitement from the team as overloaded bakkie pulled into the quarry."

The International Bicycle Fund also reported, "for years, fetching water for Mariamman of Siranjeni village was one of many dreary chores. When the village dried up in summer, she had to trudge 2 km to a neighbouring village to secure water. Now fetching water is far easier, all she has to do is take her bike. Like Mariamman, thousands of women in Pudukottai Nadu are using their bicycles, not just to fetch water but for a myriad of utility trips. But it hasn't always been this way. It was a novel literacy drive, launched in 1991, that has led to 50 000 women in the 3 000 villages of Pudukottai, 370 km from Madras, India, to learn to ride bicycles.....next the program coordinators arranged bank loans to buy bikes."

Further the International Bicycle Fund reports that, "Cuba made headlines in the early 90's by implementing an aggressive bike transport policy. Between 1991 and 1997 they increased their bike supply by over 2 million: 1.5 million were imported, mainly from China, and another half million were produced domestically..." it goes further to say, there are also deterrents to cycling: lack of bikes, tools and spares, road safety, food shortages, mechanical problems with bikes, lack of bike infrastructure, poor pavement conditions, a shortage of metal and paint for traffic signs...."

The South African Government is sponsoring a program called Shova Kalula (Zulu for Pedal or Ride Easy) Bicycle Transport Programme, approved in 2000. To this effect, the Department of Transport has set the goal of distributing one million affordable bicycles countrywide in a period of five to ten years. In addition, a serious effort will need to be made to have all municipalities include non-motorised transport as a mainstream mode in their local transport plans and projects.

During the demonstration phase of the programme, the Department made an amount of R10 million available to supply 19 411 bicycles to schoolchildren. To date 22 Shova Kalula micro business enterprises have been established in six provinces.

These examples highlight the neglected strategic potential for bicycle transport to make a quick difference in the lives of ordinary people. But they need access to affordable bikes, good maintenance services, and well-designed infrastructure in combination with a safe and predictable road environment.

In South Africa, and other parts of the world there is a growing challenge of congestion in our major cities at times leading to a sprawl of sub-urban areas. The mushrooming of sub-urban areas leads to an increase in travel distances, also putting a strain to public transport infrastructure. Most of the residential areas are located more than 20kms from employment centres, in our country.

A solution to this problem, we have resolved in South Africa, as earlier stated includes the use of non-motorised transport – the acceptance and promotion of walking as a form of public transport, and bicycles. In our vision, we are not aiming at removing all motor vehicles on the road through cycling. Our approach is driven by the rationale that while the motor vehicle is the dominant mode of the century, and is a status symbol to some, the protection of our environment through increased cycling is a worthy inheritance we can bequeath to our children.

The use of bicycles mainly around cities as a means of transport, meets various deterrents. As the Cuba example tells us, infrastructure and city designs are key to the safe riding of bicycles in and around cities. We are still faced with a situation where municipal roads are being built for motorist. This is a task that municipalities must respond to squarely in designing their public transport plans, infrastructure development, and land use policies.

Cyclists present here who would have travelled on our roads will attest to the fact that Cape Town, and so as other cities are not friendly to cyclists. I experienced the hazards faced by many cyclists daily on our roads during October last year, where I was nearly knocked by a car off the road in Tswane during the month where we were promoting the use of public transport.

For us, then, the biggest impediments to widespread bicycle use are safety concerns, affordability and simple lack of awareness of the advantages of cycling as a transport option on the part of both planners and potential users.

This is probably a good occasion to issue a challenge to the transport sector in South Africa. What is stopping us from ensuring that all new transport developments provide for and support cycling and walking infrastructure interventions? A further challenge, is it not necessary that some defined portion of the passenger transport infrastructure budget at all 3 spheres of Government be allocated to providing for walking and cycling infrastructure?

Research has indicated that non-motorised transport is cost effective, with minimal strain on the budget, and that the programme could have a great impact on the livelihoods of the majority of the peoples of the world.

Another inspiring story of the bicycle is that of the first Secretary General of the African National Congress, Sol Plaatje who cycled coast to coast in 1912 warning rural communities of an impending Land Act in, which would preclude Blacks from owning property. This time we must use other modes of transport to move from coast to coast and inform people that increased private car use is not sustainable and that the bicycle is a viable alternative.

I look forward to hearing what the experts and activists attending this conference think about how to proceed. The Velo Mondial Cape Town 2006 gives us the opportunity to learn from recent international experience and apply the lessons creatively as we continue with our own efforts of reconstruction and development.

May you have a successful conference.

I thank you.