

Velo Mondial 2006: Cape Town, South Africa.

Synopsis of the logic behind and objectives of The “Million Bike/ Thousand Job” project proposals.

Presented by Ron Thompson;

65 years a cyclist;

long time advocate of Mobility for the Majority via the bicycle;

*regular contributor to “Ride” magazine and African Correspondent for “Bike Europe”
on bicycle and mobility matters – those in the past (historic perspective), present and
promoting the potential of the bicycle to avoid, alleviate or solve
many of the projected transport problems of the future;*

founding board member of Biketrac (out of which came Afribike);

*founder of Cyc-Ous and the Motive Power Movement
and, most recently, consultant to the Axiz/Qhubeka Project**

(bicycles as the healthiest, most ecologically friendly, economically viable, easily sustainable means
of transport for getting rural children in disadvantaged communities to school.)*

The Plight of the Rural Child in Getting to School:

The author's main aim and, thus the focus of the paper submitted for presentation and discussion at Velo Mondial is...

Bicycles to the Rescue!

One concept all delegates to Velo Mondial would certainly subscribe to is that:
the bicycle is the “Ideal vehicle for a Small Planet”

The evolution and objective of the prior organizations in which the author *was*, in the past – and *is, still, currently* – involved, is based on this premise:-

That, if education is to be ***the road out of poverty***, then accessibility to a faster means of easier progress down that path is essential to the acceleration of the process.

For children needing to get to school,
the bicycle is the cheapest and healthiest option – affording a multitude of benefits as well as the possibility of huge savings.

For children the big advantage of owning a bicycle is in saving in time and energy as opposed to having to walk to school. (See statistics footnote)

However, the potential of the pedal-powered machine offers far more. In an ecologically positive manner, the bicycle will more efficiently and economically propel poverty alleviation at a faster pace.

In addition to providing other worthwhile benefits to the child- all of which make big savings possible - there are other aspects to consider.

In monetary terms alone, massive savings are attainable also for the parents and the local community as well as to the municipal, provincial and national authorities, whose responsibility it is to provide for the many pressing needs of the people, all within a limited budget.

Prioritising according to (perceived) urgency and availability of funds is always a difficult call for Authorities.

But when the authorities come to consider alternatives - the choice between (on the one hand)

subsidizing the cost to the recipient
of ***the self-propelled, go- anywhere bicycle***

and, on the other,
having to find the funding for the long term cost
of expensive-to-run-and-maintain, fuel-guzzling busses

*(charging fares which yet remain unaffordable,
this in spite of subsidisation by the authorities) –*

Then, were money the sole consideration
(and clearly there is more to it than that)
a comparison between these two costs
would reveal that the only logical answer is - ***the bicycle!***

Significant though these savings could be,
the bicycle offers far more than just monetary advantages.

Summing up some of the more pertinent points in its favour, the bicycle is...

- Ecologically friendly;
- Economically superior;
- Easy to maintain;
- Energy saving (both human and fuel wise)

Add up the advantages of the ***bicycle***;
measure these against the disadvantages of ***bussing***
(*an option even less viable where the condition of - or lack of - roads,
mitigate against motorized transport*) and then...

- ***make*** the cost comparisons....
(from commuter, operator ***and*** government expenditure viewpoints)
- ***count*** the reasons why the drive ***should*** be directed to pushing pedal-driven two wheelers as ***the*** vehicle for school-going transport,
- ***examine*** the cost, the pollution, the fuel consumption of busses then...
- ***look*** at the lack of delivery and (insufficiency of) funding by the authorities for bicycles.

Taking such criteria into consideration, the apparent in-action on the part of the authorities to support the speeding up of bicycle delivery seems all the more unaccountable.

The government has accepted in principal (and often talks of) their...

- ***Ten Year plan****
- ***to deliver a Million bicycles***
- ***to provide mobility***
- ***for the Disadvantaged Majority in this country...***

(*a plan drafted by Afribike, presented to the NDoT in 2002 and adopted by the late Dulla Omar, then head of the National Department of Transport)

According to the best information, this project - to be implemented under the government's own Shova Kalula programme - has, in the four years since inception, so far been responsible for delivering less than 20,000 cycles.

What this Velo Mondial paper seeks to do is show where the wheels have come off previously and what is needed to get the vehicle back on the right road and progressing smoothly and speedily towards a brighter future.

The Governments Shova Kahula project ...

was always envisaged as a public/ private sector (partnership) initiative.

Afribike was the initial NGO (private sector) initiative appointed by the the Government via the National Roads Agency to implement Phase One of the rollout. With the benefit of hindsight, it is easy to realize that this **should** have been an exploratory, learning experience phase.

Before walking, a baby has first to crawl. In the process a child needs support. Only later can the child then be expected to stand on it's own two feet and, still later, master running skills.

Though the infant Afribike failed to deliver (given the overly- optimistic promises) yet valuable lessons were learned in the process.

The outcomes of these initial stumblings led, for instance, to the formation of the **Bicycle Empowerment Network (BEN)**.

Neither **BEN** nor **Cyc-Ous**, nor **the Motive Power Movement** nor **Qhubeka** (*the Socio Economic Development project of the employee owned IT company Axiz*) are Government funded. They are all private sector Bicycle initiatives.

Though each of these movements is similar in some respects – in having incorporated into the set-up, structure and running of their project many of the principles and lessons learned from the Afribike experience- each has a different area of focus and operation.

- **BEN's** projects are primarily in the Cape;
- **Cyc-Ous/the Motive Power Movement** is (currently) operational mainly in Gauteng and...
- **Qhubeka** is (very specifically) Kwazulu- Natal based, (*working in conjunction with the Wildlands Conservation Trust where schoolchildren grow trees which they can exchange for cycles*)

Yet we all agree on this Philosophy. Vis:-

*“Sustainable Mobility is not **just** about providing bicycles”.*

One needs to have a viable self-supporting service and spares structure in place to keep the wheels turning and look after ongoing maintenance. This is particularly the case in Rural Areas where the nearest cycle shop could be 200 km or more away.

That is why we are proposing a Revision and a Refocus to “Repair the Punctures” that have brought the Shova Kalula project to a virtual standstill.

The solution to enable the project to proceed and ensure attainment of the Ten Year Objective:-

“A Million Bikes” must be linked to “A Thousand Jobs”

Like a horse and carriage, the two go together
(*and you can't have one without the other*).

A “Bike Park” having a thousand cycles running in a particular area is considered the ***minimum viable volume*** to sustain a single man, spares and service operation.

Thus 1000 bikes per area, in 1000 areas = 1 000 000 bikes.
Rollout, over a ten Year period, at 100 areas per annum = 100 000 bikes p.a.

Using (for the sake of a cost estimate and logistic mode),
the figure of R500* per cycle across 1000 cycles delivered per area
(*including the cost of training and setting up
the service centre in the community)
100 areas p.a. X 1000 cycles each area X R500 ea = R50 000 000.

Sounds a lot. And even more enormous when looking at the Ten Year projection. **R500 000 000!**

But...

Consider this : from a administration standpoint there are at least 25 departments within the government who could – and should be looking at the bicycle as the most effective and economical method of quickly (and yet ***permanently***) addressing some of the problems they are responsible for solving- especially those relating to children, poverty alleviation, upliftment health, rural development, job creation, mobility for the majority being just some of the priorities.

Obviously the department of Transport is topmost on this list and, yes, bicycles ***are*** on their agenda. The NDoT should be leading the way in bicycle delivery, dictating the pace at the front of the peleton of Government Departments.

The NDoT ***should*** be driving bicycle delivery by formulating interdepartmental co-operative policy and facilitating implementation strategy.

But what Mobility Priority Message is NDoT sending out to other government departments, let alone the disadvantaged people (who are, after all, probably the largest sector of the voting populace) when the government is spending billions on the *Gautrain?

The primary “justification” for *this rail exercise is the postulation that it will lead to a reduction in Fat-Cat, one-car-per-person commuting in the triangle of which Tswane, Johannesburg and the International Airport (whatever its name becomes) form the cornerstones.

Talking about triangles and cornerstones, suppose we view the Government’s Socio-Economic Development policy in terms of a triangle, where the broad base of the disadvantaged populace to be uplifted (the have-nots) is at the bottom and the elite (the “haves”) are at the top.

It was Robin Hood who took from the rich to give to the poor. But the cornerstones of the SED strategy are;

- to narrow the gap between rich and poor;
- by “narrowing the width of the base”
- (i.e. by lifting people out of base poverty)
- through affording the opportunity
- to participate in-
- (and thus contribute to)-
- the bettering of the economy.
-

The more people able to earn a wage and thus able to participate in the economy and the more people progressing to higher levels within it, the better the economy of that country.

SED (and thus BEE) policy states that you have to start at the bottom.

Therefore SED approach to Mobility is not only about how to get from place to place but of providing the means of UPWARD progress out of poverty.

Thus the ***Department of Education***, in recognizing the problems and realising that education is both the “Way Put” and the “Way Up”, has, itself, provided more bikes to get children to school than has NDoT.

Now think ***Job Creation***.

1000 jobs for self-employed Bike Mechanics.

A little support here and a bit of training will go a long way.

Now think **Health**.

Aids workers... can get around to more sufferers, faster and more conveniently on a bicycle.

Even the **Department of Sport** comes into consideration.

They have declared that first funding consideration will go to developing children.

Cyclists and cycling bodies tend to focus on the recreational and competitive aspects of the sport.

It simply **has** to be a more basic beginning than that.

If more children were to ride even a basic bicycle at an early age, there will be a bigger pool from which to select to develop those who show sporting talent and ability.

Where else will future top cyclists come from unless we begin at the base?

Facilitating the provision of subsidized bicycles to ride to school is where to begin.

There are at least 25 Government Departments which could/should be involved to cooperate and so share in the cost of development of this concept.

***25 - each at just R2 000 000 p.a. -
and you have your R50 000 000/100 000 bikes p.a.***

That is the message to government.

Facilitate is the operative word here. We are **not** proposing that the child be **given** a bike for free, quite the contrary - though we are strongly advocating **subsidization**.

Pride of ownership is crucial to creating an understanding of responsibility. Therefore recipients must themselves contribute toward the cost of the cycle. In doing so one fosters an understanding and acceptance of one of the primary pre-requisites essential to socially acceptable and sustainable self-advancement viz; that work is necessary and the means by which one can expect to gain something worthwhile, meaningfully.

It is proposed that the subsidisation of the purchase of the bicycle and support in establishing the rural self-employed spares and service mechanic/entrepreneur be the means by which the system can be implemented.

Though these concepts are not new (and were incorporated in the Afribike/Shova Kalula rural setup) the failure here is an insufficient volume of cycles through insufficient provision and a system of payment forthcoming unrelated to throughput of cycles.

This shortcoming is overcome where there is a rate related to the sale of a cycle (money coming from the recipient) and a sufficiency of cycles

throughput. This aspect has been dealt with in more detail in the comprehensive implementation proposal document.

The Private sector initiative
(and the potential for Private sector/ public sector cooperation).

In the case of the Qhubeka/Wildlands project, children collect seeds and grow indigenous trees which they exchange for cycles
(Wildlands sells the trees, yielding one fifth the cost of the cycles and helmet, the other four-fifths coming from the project's sponsor, the IT employee-owned company, Axiz.

It was envisaged
(and a challenge/offer proposed to NDoT) that:-

- in a public/ private sector partnership,
- for every Rand “put on the table” (committed to) by the government
- for the furtherance of the Million Bike/Thousand Job aims,
- a challenge be issued to (a selection of) BEE organizations
- to raise a similar sum
- for which they would receive credit
- under their SED Points Scoring Evaluation/Requirement.

However, with certain Industry charters now being negotiated dealing with how these points are to be awarded and scored (and in other charters where these requirements have already been agreed and stipulated) the “conditions” mitigate against the proposed arrangement.

Just as a Sports Sponsor is entitled to expect “Publicity Mileage” in return for his contribution, so Commercial and industrial concerns engaged in “Charitable Altruism” should be able to derive exposure benefit from their involvement.

Where the B.E.E. /S.E.D. “Requirement” becomes a “Limited Option Obligation” without choice of the “Method of Delivery” or consideration of possible Selected Recipient Need, you build a “Glass Slipper” condition. As in the Cinderella story, there was much resentment, since the shoe could only fit one foot.

Though Industry SED Charters must, obviously, impose some limitations, allow us here to give an example of impending “conditions”, already being considered, which, if ratified, will have the effect of restricting - if not precluding - Private sector cooperation by the IT industry in the Million Bike/Thousand job implementation – since such “Limiting Conditions” could affect Private Sector participation in any project involving bicycles.

I am given to understand that, in the IT industry, two of the criteria that are stipulated require the endorsement of both the departments of health and that of education. Thus any proposed scheme of benefit must first have the approval of these departments in order to qualify for points under the SED

system. On the score of Health and Education a scheme like Qhubeka would presumably have no trouble in qualifying as the bicycle adequately applies.

It is the next Stipulation which troubles me since it undermines the very principles on which the SED requirement is based.

It proposes that firms are to earn points from projects involving IT products.

Medical products I can understand. Bricks for buildings -OK.
But how could this apply to the liquor or tobacco industry?

First though let me relate the experience of our own Qhubeka sponsor Axiz which I feel is pertinent to why this concept being farce about base or base over pinnacle according to SED basic policy.

A few years ago the CEO of the company, wanting to get involved in some form of local Corporate Social Responsibility Project, approached a School in area near Diepsloot, offering to give them computers.

Expecting grateful acceptance he was met with embarrassed confusion – obviously causing him much perplexity – until the situation was explained to him by the headmistress. What the school most needed, she said, were BASIC REQUIREMENTS – books, shoes, clothing.

I am reminded here of the remark Marie Antoinette of France was supposed to have made when told that “*The people had no bread*” “*So let them eat cake*” she purportedly replied.

Let us use our heads in this matter by not guillotining the potential of private sector sponsorship or cooperation with the Government.

One factor alone should point to the absurdity of the proposal.
The areas must in need of socio-economic upliftment are those communities in the remote Areas
WHERE THERE ARE FEW ROADS ...AND NO ELECTRICITY

Using that triangle example again, computer products are at the pinnacle. Basic needs must first be addressed.
Get those at the top (like IT) focused on the those with more basic needs.
For Mobility you simply cannot get more basic than the bicycle.
It is energy efficient, consuming no fossil fuel, needing no electricity.
The motive power is on a human scale.

Though I deem the logic of these proposals to be irrefutable, what is lacking is people in the right places to motivate the actions necessary to again get the wheels turning - this time with more gusto.

Let us hope that

***Velo Mondial will put more power behind
the Push to Promote the Pedal***

