

## **ABSTRACT**

During the past 30 years (1976-2006) South Africa has benefited from the growth in the popularity of cycling. However, Cycletourism, which has the potential for even greater long-term and year-round benefits for the country, is hardly evident. The objective of this presentation is to earnestly promote Cycletourism in South Africa by stressing the need for and value of investment in the construction of world-class Cycleways.

Four ambitious local initiatives over the same period will be sketched, giving a brief outline of the ideas that inspired them and the progress to date, to illustrate their value to Cycletourism and - importantly - to cultivate support for each of them.

- (1) 1976-1979 Cape Peninsula Network of Cyclepaths;
- (2) 1978-1996 Table Mountain Cycleway;
- (3) 1982-1984 Little Karoo, Touwsrivier/Ladismith Cycleway;
- (4) 1996-2006 Garden Route Cycleway.

## **MARKETPLACE PRESENTATION M 3B**

DEFINITIONS. In this presentation **Cycleway** refers to the South African definitions of four classes of cycle path, ranked in order of traffic safety and cyclist's preference. Class 1 is a facility exclusively for cyclists with its own alignment and is termed a Cycleway. Class 2 is a separate path for cyclists in a road reserve, parallel to the road; Class 3 is a lane for cyclists on the road, and Class 4 is a road with low motor traffic counts and low speeds.

**Cycletourism** refers to the activity of touring a country or region by bicycle, in your own time and at your own speed. It excludes racing or mass-start events and in its purest form excludes any form of motorised travel. However, it may include touring with Sagwagon support, or motoring to a region from where day trips are made by bicycle.

My long-held conviction is that a major inhibitor of cycling in general is the real or perceived danger and unpleasantness of cycling on roads built for motor vehicles. Were we to provide well designed, built and maintained cycleways, cycling would flourish with tangible benefits of a wide spectrum of our society.

In 1976 Bill Mylrea, who had already filed a petition with Cape Town municipality calling for safe cyclepaths, suggested that he and I form a club to band together cyclists interested in cycling for transportation and recreation; having done that, the club should again petition local authorities to provide safe and enjoyable facilities for cyclists. [Note that clubs for competitive cycling had been in existence here since the 1890's, but non-competitive cycling had no structure.] Within a year we had founded the Western Province Pedal Power Association (WPPPA) with the objective of promoting cycling for recreation and transportation. It had about 30 enthusiastic members with diverse skills, such as Louis de Waal with traffic planning know-how, and conducted an important transportation survey with assistance from Rotary.

THE ARGUS TOUR. Our deputation to the municipality was told that municipal funds were severely limited and because the municipality is unaware of the existence of cyclists it could not justify expenditure on facilities that would not be utilized. WPPPA had therefore to demonstrate to them that cyclists would appear if they were given safe traffic-free roads to ride on. WPPPA first staged the Big Ride In demonstration, and then the far more ambitious 105km Argus Cycle Tour in 1978 which would use the peninsula's best and most scenic roads. To everyone's great astonishment the first Argus Tour drew almost 500 cyclists - the largest gathering of cyclists ever seen in South Africa.

(1) 1979 CAPE PENINSULA BIYCLE PLAN. The second Argus Tour in 1979 drew almost double the number of cyclists, and shortly thereafter Cape Town's municipal Council instructed the City Engineer to make a proposal for a solution to the problem of bicycle safety. At that time I was in the employ of City Engineers Department as an architect. However, having been the founding chairman of WPPPA, leader of the Bicycle Transport Study conducted by the Rondebosch Rotary Club as well as the organiser of the first two Argus Cycle Tours, I was asked to form a Study Group to "make specific proposals for the commencement of the provision of bicycle facilities (bicycle paths, bicycle lock-ups and traffic controls) in certain areas of Cape Town", and given 6 weeks in which to complete it! On our 4-man team were traffic engineer Dave Eadie and architect Mike Brown from the department, and Louis de Waal as outside consultant.

We completed the work in five weeks. The Study Group defined the four classes of cyclepath, now adopted nationally, and recommended a network of Class 1 and Class 2 facilities covering the Peninsula which would require expenditure exceeding R2'000'000. The report was presented to Council, who approved major portions and allocated almost R1'000'000 over three years. We believed that Cape Town was now set to construct the most comprehensive, expansive and advanced network of cyclepaths of any city in Africa, or possibly the southern hemisphere.

Very little of that scheme was ever built, and just over two years later the municipality had abandoned it! The reasons I give for this tragic failure are: (1) That the project was neglected by the City Engineers department because it did not employ staff whose task it would be to handle this specific project, (2) The low level of importance given to walking and cycling as evidenced by the 1982 Metropolitan Transportation Plan which listed them as 'other minor modes', and (3) That the WPPPA switched to promoting competitive cycling and lost contact with the City Engineers department.

Cape Town lost some great opportunities that were available to cyclists three decades ago, but the reasons for failure are at last being countered, so once again the future looks good. Although WPPPA (now Pedal Power) continue to specialize in competitive cycling with attendant social events, and contribute little to bicycle planning, Pedal Power Foundation in conjunction with BEN (Bicycle Empowerment Network) liaises with the municipality. Cape Town municipality's present long-term bicycle planning initiatives can be attributed to the efforts of Louis de Waal and Dave Eadie to create a division there, now headed by Kevin Garrod, to attend to bicycle planning. Finally, there is a most welcome turn-around in official perceptions of the value of NMT - as announced at the opening of this conference.

(2) 1978 TABLE MOUNTAIN CYCLEWAY. While working on the bicycle network, I had the idea that a recreational cycleway around Table Mountain would be a marvelous thing for Cape Town. I still believe that! What other major world city could provide a comparable wilderness cycling experience? Ivan Speed, the then Chief

Traffic Planner, was supportive of the idea but cited difficulties in gaining permission and in justifying the estimated cost of R40'000.

I continued to write and talk about the concept. In 1983 I presented it at the South African Institute of Town and Regional Planners conference in Cape Town, noting that it might compensate for the abandoned 1979 peninsula network. The press liked the Table Mountain idea, and it seemed to have public support, but at that time there was a power struggle underway for control over Table Mountain. I was advised to wait until this had been resolved. Ten years later I stood for election to the WPPPA committee on the ticket that I'd work to promote this project within WPPPA. In 1994 it was estimated to cost a staggering R10'000'000 and news of the scheme brought out a stream of old and new objections. There was great concern for the environmental damage it might do, that it would be unsightly, that it would interfere with walkers, and that it should not be allowed to traverse the National Botanical Gardens at Kirstenbosch! Of course none of these objections should have been allowed to scuttle the project. The mountain was already badly scarred and since the objective of the cycleway would be to create a beautiful natural environment for cycling this would require the damaged areas to be repaired. Walkers and joggers (for whom there have always been paths) could use the cycleway within reason and the cycleway would not be used for racing. Kirstenbosch, already traversed by walkers, would be a prime tourist destination on the cycleway. Surely it does not matter if tourists arrive on foot or by bicycle?

I lost the battle, probably due to my inability to deal with the political issues, and WPPPA issued statements formally distancing themselves from the concept. But for all practical reasons this is a scheme that is still quite possible, and one that is needed now more than ever before. What a pity that for almost three decades so many people have been denied this great wilderness cycling experience.

**(3) 1982 LITTLE KAROO - TOUWSRIVIER / LADISMITH CYCLWAY.** Cyclists in many other countries have been able to make effective use of abandoned railways. In the UK old railways allow cyclists to travel safely between and through villages and towns. In America abandoned railways have made spectacular wilderness bicycle trails. When extensive floods hit the small town of Laingsburg in the Great Karoo in 1980, the loss of life and stories of human survival and rescue were paramount. News of the simultaneous destruction of the remote railway between Touwsrivier and Ladismith was understandably overshadowed. Perishable farm produce and other goods had to be transported by road, and once the repair costs were known a decision was taken to abandon the line. The railway line was about 150km long, falling just 250m over that distance.

My wife and I motored with friends along part of the route (because much of it was inaccessible by car) in 1981. During that trip I hatched a plan to return for an adventure with a mission. The adventure would be to adapt bicycles to ride on the rails and the mission would be to try to have the route re-opened as a wilderness cycleway - believing that the beauty and special charm would be hugely popular amongst adventure cyclists, and would bring tourist revenue to what appeared to be an area in need of economic opportunity.

The rail ride, with Ed Jacobs and Eddie Nijeboer the following year, certainly was an adventure. The line was more extensively damaged than expected, and parts that had not been damaged had been loosened or already removed. But it was undoubtedly a magnificent scenic area with great cycling appeal.

The tourism people in Ladismith, however, did not share the view. Neither did land owners who were quick to erect fences and reclaim the land. The death knell came from the South African Transport Services who explained that they were entitled to expropriate land for a rail reserve so long as they operated a rail service. Once the rail service ceased, the land was to be sold back the current owner of the farm in question.

Talking to a farmer in that vicinity twenty three years later (2005) I was pleasantly surprised to hear her say that she thought it a wonderful idea and would welcome it! She said that the area is still starved of economic opportunities, and farms have been bought by people who do not intend to farm but to simply enjoy the countryside. She lamented the large increase in motor traffic, particularly 4x4 vehicles, all of which create dust and noise. Touring cyclists would therefore be most welcome. This is still a great project, and I'm encouraged by information gleaned at VM2006 that the problems of securing right of way, as well as funding, can be overcome.

**(4) 1996 GARDEN ROUTE CYCLEWAY.** This is the big one. The GRC is conceived as a 350km long Cycleway between George and Port Elizabeth. Fly in, spend a week or more exploring South Africa's premier recreational coastal strip by bicycle, and fly out. Alternatively, motor to any of the well-known tourist destinations such as Knysna, Plettenberg Bay or Jeffrey's Bay and do day trips. There is nothing like this anywhere in Africa. It would create a cycle touring industry in South Africa with the potential to exceed the economic value the Argus/PnP Cycle Tour.

That's the idea; however, as with the three previous cycleway concepts, there are difficulties. There is a full bag of politics, ecological concerns, lack of funding, NIMBYs, pessimism, apathy, ignorance, conflicts of interest, questions of personal safety, and more. Yet, in common with the other cycleway concepts and the Argus Tour, once it had been established people would find it hard to believe that there could ever have been any objection to it.

The GRC stretches between two provinces and traverses several municipalities. Progress over ten years has been minimal. At present the GRC only appears in only one municipality's Spatial Development Framework (SDF), that of Bitou, the municipal region around Plettenberg Bay. On the strength of that the GRC has very recently made its appearance on the planning consultant's plan for the revitalization of Plettenberg Bay's central tourist beaches. The GRC ought to have appeared in the District SDF, but of greater significance is the fact that the new Regional SDF stipulates that priority be given to planning for NMT. This is a major departure from the previous attitude that NMT is a 'minor mode'.

Plettenberg Bay's municipal officials have persistently noted three insurmountable problems: (i) Justification for the expenditure required, (ii) Lack of funding, (iii) Inability to secure the rights of way required. I now have renewed hope that these problems can be resolved.

(i) Justification. Newspaper and radio reports claim that 60% of the 35'000 riders in the 2006 Argus / Pick 'n Pay Cycle Tour came from outside the peninsula, and that the tour weekend brought between R320m and R400m into Cape Town.

It is not that the average spend by each cyclist in the event is R9'000. The calculation includes expenditure by persons accompanying each participant and by others who spend more over the period because of the event. However, if 35'000 cyclists generate almost R350m to ride a 100km temporary Class 1 cycleway that is available to them on only one day each year, what could we expect if they had 350km of permanent Class 1 cycleway available to them 360 days of the year?

Firstly, instead of the remarkable sight of two lanes of highway packed with a stream of cyclists that take four to six hours to ride past, the same number of cyclists on the GRC would only show, on average, an almost imperceptible 0.27 cyclists per kilometer per day. The GRC would therefore have the capacity to accommodate far more riders per year. It is almost a decade since the Argus/PnP tour organisers restricted the entry to 35'000. If one considers that possibly 90% of the riders are resident in South Africa, and that each year there are is a high percentage of first-time participants, one can conclude that by now there could be in the region of 200'000 to 250'000 cyclists in South Africa seeking somewhere to enjoy cycling in safety on all the other days of the year. Add foreign cycle tourists and instead of 35'000 cyclists per annum the GRC might attract 350'000 cyclist days per annum.

Secondly, instead of a massive inflow of R350m over one weekend, GRC cyclists may spend on average less per person and less per day. However, given the greater number of GRC cyclists, and expectation that they will stay for longer, the annual economic benefit, spread more evenly over the year, might well exceed that of the Argus/PnP event.

Thirdly, the Argus/PnP event is recreational and sporadic. The GRC would benefit commuting cyclists daily, and it would create permanent jobs in the hospitality and tourism sectors, as well as maintenance and support.

(ii) Funding is required to meet the costs of planning, land acquisition, contract management and construction, maintenance and administration. Planning and administration, essential at the outset, are relatively minor and foreign funding may be available for this.

(iii) VM2006 has given me some interesting new ideas which suggest that securing the rights of way necessary may in fact be legally possible and inexpensive.

Prior to VM2006 I was despondent over the lack of progress with this project due to seemingly insurmountable obstacles. Post VM2006 my mood has switched to optimism. I believe now that it can be justified on economic grounds, that it may well be possible to fund the commencement of planning and administration, and that the necessary rights of way can be secured. Whether or not the GRC does come into being, I continue to hold the view that **Cycletourism** has the potential to be of enormous economic and general value to this country for many decades to come, and to reap this benefit we have to build **Cycleways** that match the best that other countries are building.

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CLCEWAY POSTERS:

1. Reproductions of newspaper cuttings that announced the adoption of the 1979 Peninsula Network of Cyclepaths as proposed by the Study Group.
2. Reproductions of WPPPA's 1994 1:50'000 map of the Table Mountain Cycleway; 1979 correspondence with Cape Town's Chief Town Planner; 1983 Argus report on SAITRP conference; 1994 Weekend Argus report and 2006 aerial photograph.
3. Little Karoo Cycleway route; 1982 Pedal Power Foundation correspondence with SA Transport Services; 1983 article for WPPPA's Velocipede; My 2005 photograph.
4. Map indicating the Garden Route Cycleway between George and Port Elizabeth; 2004 Bitou SDF Structural Elements map; 2004 article for CX Press with GRC indicated on aerial view of Plettenberg Bay; 2006 Map showing restructuring of Plettenberg Bay town center; My illustrative picture of a Bavarian cycleway.