

THE FUTURE OF CYCLING

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ABSTRACT

The future is never certain but odd events or trends can be predicted with a reasonable amount of accuracy. One such trend is the use of the bicycle. It resembles the roller coaster graphs of shares on the stock exchanges, but like a good investment, increases with time.

Being the most efficient vehicle invented by humans it has been embraced by some nations and integrated into their transport planning- The Netherlands, Denmark and Germany for example. These countries, and the more than 100 cities that have instigated bicycle hire facilities, are paving the way of using the bicycle to its maximum benefit. The global environment is under stress and the way various countries approach remedial measures in their life styles, especially with transport, will affect future quality of life.

This paper will elaborate on some of the above statements with particular emphasis on South Africa and to where the future of cycling could head with improved legislation affecting non motorised transport.

Acceptable and Sensible Remedies in Legislation

With the internet allowing one to download transport innovations throughout the world to a laptop, it is easy to explore and learn what designers are achieving in making cycling more acceptable and less dangerous.

South Africa has a huge potential to become a cycling country as it has good weather and a population who enjoy sport and exercise. 35000 cyclists enter the car free Cape Argus/ Pick 'n Pay cycle tour but how many become bicycle commuters when the tour is over. The common answer is it "too dangerous to cycle on our roads due to the volume of motorised traffic". The popularity of cycling is still evident in the huge numbers that have taken to mountain biking to avoid the dangers of the paved roads. Many cyclists visiting this country have stated that South Africa has the best climate and scenery for off-road cycling as well as excellently organised mountain bike events.

To make cycling safer, therefore more acceptable, one has to review the present traffic laws.



Photograph by: Oakpics.com

Sharing the Road

Both motor vehicles and bicycles are defined in law as “vehicles” and therefore the some road rules apply to both. One wonders how many road users in South Africa are aware of this fact. Respect for each other on the road is therefore a pre-requisite for safety. For the vulnerable cyclist, stopping at traffic signals or stop streets must be observed. Riding single file is also important. Ideally parents and especially schools, should make learners understand the laws of the road. It is a known fact the cyclists, who are taught safe cycling, become safer drivers when graduating to motor vehicle drivers.



1,5m Clearance

One of the most important factors in sharing the road is the gap or clearance, required when motorised vehicles overtake bicycles. A motorised vehicle passing a cyclist at 80km/h or more causes turbulence making cycling unstable. The Western Cape Department of Transport and Public Works intends passing a new law which will require a clearance of at least 1,5m - similar to traffic laws in several safety conscience countries. It maybe a difficult law to enforce but as long as every licensed driver of a motor vehicle is aware of this clearance required, safer cycling will benefit.

In France where this law applies, the respect between motor vehicle and cyclist is first class. If a motor vehicle knocks over a cyclist, the driver will be deemed to be fault.

K53 Manual

The K53 Manual for learner drivers needs to be updated with respect to non-motorised transport. When learner drivers are questioned, when applying for a licence, some compulsory questions concerning non-motorised transport should be included e.g. sharing of the road and the 1,5m clearance.



Safety Training of Cyclists

Cycling starts at a young age with no formal training of road safety, other than by parents. Many a learner heads off to school on a bicycle without proper training.

The Bicycling Empowerment Network (BEN) has assisted the Western Cape Departments of Transport and of Education with the distribution of bicycles within the Shova Kalula program to promote affordable mobility for learners. BEN has developed a two hour training course which encompasses all aspects of safe cycling, viz care of the bicycle, checks before cycling, hand signals, how to cycle in traffic or on gravel roads, cycling a set out course and how to maintain a bicycle. At the end each participant receives a certificate which states they have completed a safe cycling course. This is not a bicycle driver's licence but at least an awareness of what is expected from a cyclist on a road.

This school training may be difficult to legislate but encouragement of safe cycling should not be neglected.



Bicycle Facilities

Bicycle facilities such as a bicycle master plan, separated bicycle paths, bicycle parking, etc are urban planning requirements but can be assisted by legislation. Another innovation that South Africa cities should consider are bicycles hire systems. Over 100 cities have installed these rental systems which have reduced traffic congestion in their central areas.

Two way bicycle path alongside bus lanes from Cape Town to Milnerton constructed on old rail reserve

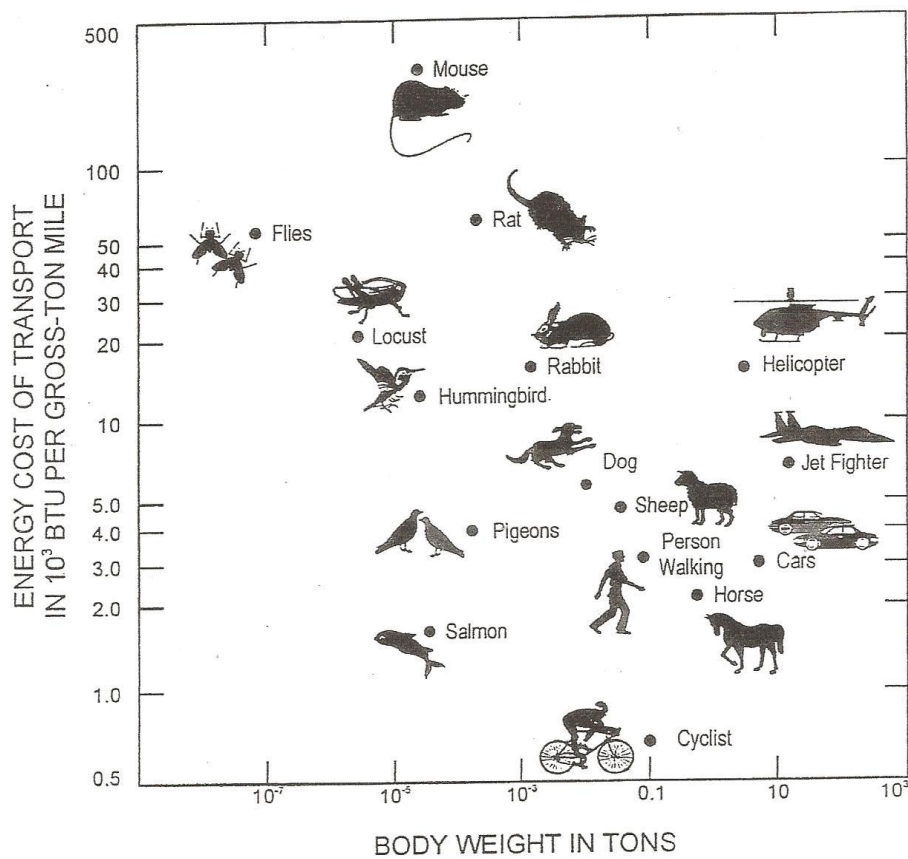


Conclusion

The bicycle has so many advantages- energy efficient (see diagram on next page) noiseless, affordable, good for health and the environment, requires little space- it simply cannot be ignored in future transport planning.

Legislation can assist several of the aspects mentioned above (especially the 1,5m clearance law) to make cycling a way of life in South Africa.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY



Source : Comparison of the Energy Efficiency of a wide assortment of "fellow travellers" (Wilson)

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